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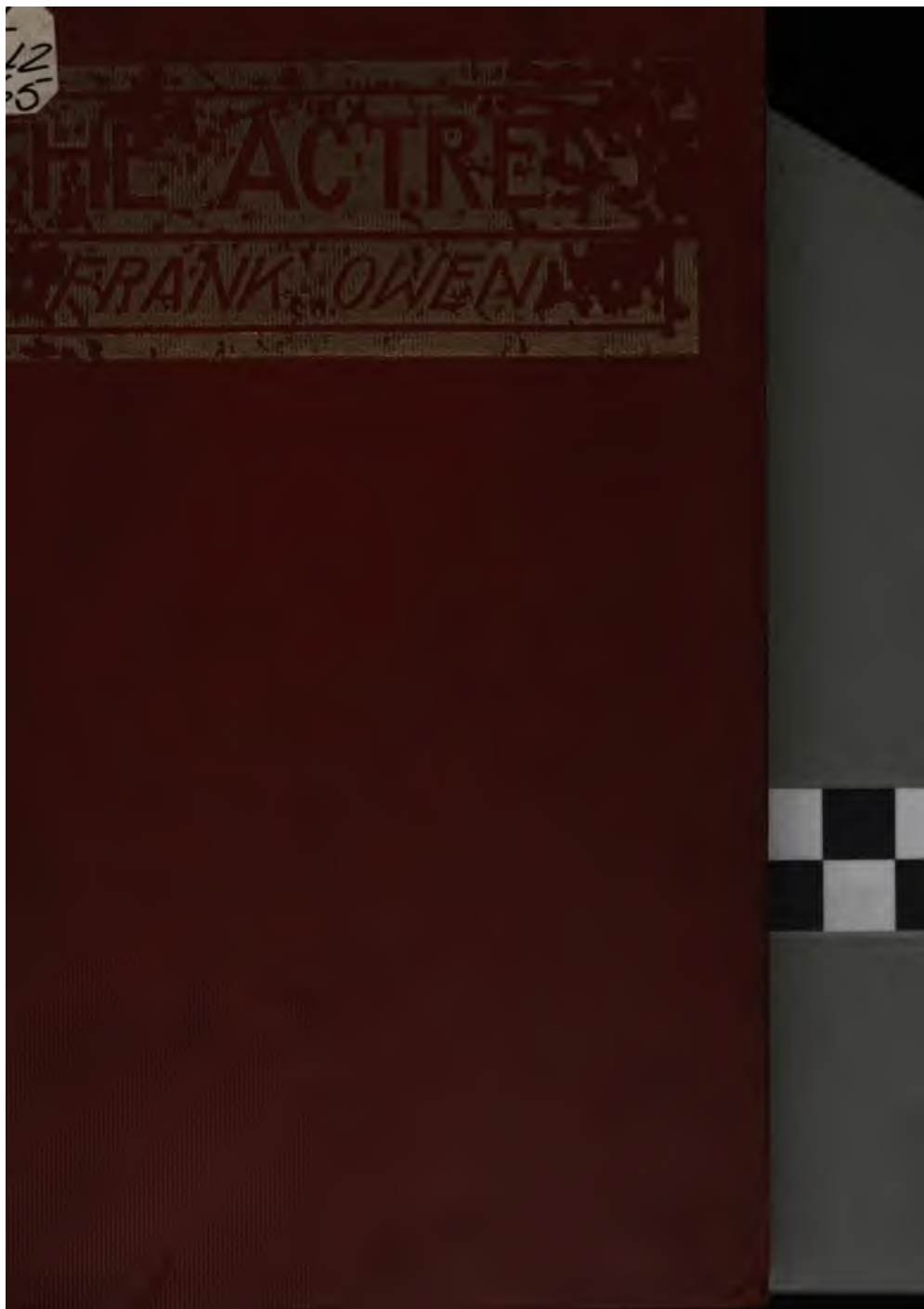
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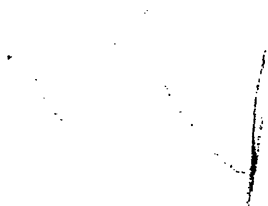
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**THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
OF NEW YORK**

1918





"She felt as though she were in the grip of hopeless things."
Page 13.

THE ACTRESS

BY
Frank Owen

Frontispiece
by
Benjamin Robinson

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BY

FRANK OWEN

To My Mother

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THE ACTRESS

THE ACTRESS

I.

As the music of the dance ceased, Olga Fullerton stole, unnoticed, out onto the balcony of the great house overlooking the Hudson. She sighed softly as she sank upon a divan. She was very tired. All night the dance had been in progress at the home of the Waddington's, and now it was almost dawn. She gazed wistfully out over the softly rippling water lapping drowsily among the rocks of the Palisades. Over the great rock wall the moon was softly rising, throwing the entire river into delightful shadow.

"It is all magnificent," she breathed rapturously.

"Yes," said a voice speaking at her elbow, "very magnificent."

With a start, she glanced up into the smiling face of Jerold Wharton. Rugged as a rock, he stood and gazed down upon her lovely shoulders in open admiration.

"I have waited here for nigh an hour," he continued.

"You wished to see me?"

"Yes, I wished to see you."

"But how did you know I would come here?"

He smiled slightly.

THE ACTRESS

"I have been to the home of the Waddington's before," said he. "Surely when a man has known a woman as many years as I have known you, he must of necessity begin to understand her."

She laughed softly, as though she were enjoying the situation immensely. "I sometimes wonder," she mused whimsically, "whether a man really ever *does* grow to understand a woman."

"I was conscious of my error as soon as I had made it," replied Jerold Wharton quickly, but in his voice there was no longer any trace of humor. "To me," he went on slowly, thoughtfully, as though he were carefully choosing each word, "woman has always seemed like the jungle—ununderstood, unconquerable and merciless. But you can always depend on the jungle. It is always terrible. You know when you enter it that you must fight."

For a moment she sat silent, gazing at the softly murmuring water, a faraway look in her fine gray eyes.

"One can scarcely charge you with being a lover of women," she said presently.

"And yet I am," came the soft reply. "To me woman has always seemed God's greatest creation. But even Creation has made mistakes. All women are not worthy of the title. But all ought to endeavor to be." He paused for a moment, then he said: "Last season in London I saw you portray the leading rôle in Carmody's great play, 'The Better Self.' I saw you fighting against predestined conditions; struggling with hateful impulse; praying in the darkness that you might behold the light. And I saw a wonderful

dawn break through the terrible billows of gloom, and in the glorious light stood a woman who had made herself. Spotless as the driven snow, she had risen from the very dregs of the city. And then I saw her sink down again, back into the depths from whence she had sprung in order that she might cover up her brother's crime. You can't overcome Destiny, but you can change it. Since that day I have never beheld a wretched woman in the streets but what I have thought of 'The Better Self.' Plays like that are like oases in the desert. They don't poison or corrupt; they just give life and make us understand."

Somewhere among the palms in the ballroom beyond them, a violinist was playing Moskovitz's "Serenata." Softly, sweetly, grandly, the music floated to their ears as though it were the echo of a dream. Now loud, now soft and calm, it fell upon the night, and somehow to the two upon the balcony it seemed sadly beautiful.

"Music," she whispered, "is the connecting link between earth and Paradise."

"Yes," he murmured, "and the 'Serenata' is a link of purest gold. But somehow, when I hear it played, it always makes me conscious of a great void in my life. So, also, does it affect Coningsby."

As he spoke, Olga looked up quickly into his eyes.

"And how is Arthur?" she asked abruptly. "Tonight, I had forgotten him entirely."

"Some women are born to forget," said he, and in his voice there was just barely perceptible the faintest suggestion of cynicism.

This Olga ignored.

"And how is Arthur?" she repeated softly.

"Coningsby is dying," said he simply. "The doctor says he cannot live a month. It seems as though it can't be true, a man of iron stricken down with typhoid as though he were no stronger than a child. When he is gone I know not what I shall do. The world will say, 'Coningsby, the explorer, is dead,' and then all will go on again as ever. But to me it will be, 'Coningsby, the friend, the comrade, who is gone.' And you must have lived in the tropics to know what that means. Why, I have seen him plunge into surging rapids to save the life of a little coal-black African child, possibly the son of a cannibal, and fight against the terrible fury of the waters until he, in turn, had been rescued by the natives. I have been lost for weeks alone with him in the awful forest, almost dead from hunger and afire from thirst. Once, down in Uganda, we lay in the blinding, scorching heat and dust, our tongues parched and blackened, half delirious with thirst. A few yards away stood a bottle containing a few precious drops of water. Although suffering frightfully, Coningsby would not even moisten his lips. It meant life for one of us, but it wasn't enough for two."

Jerold Wharton paused for a moment, as though he could see again the picture which he described blazing out before his eyes.

Olga placed her hand softly upon his arm. "Tell me," she said, and her voice shook, "did you drink the water?"

He did not reply.

Again she repeated the question.

"No," he replied at last, "neither drank a drop. I wish I could tell you of the tortures we suffered during the few hours we lay baking in that terrible sun. We could not sweat. Our bodies were boiled dry."

"And yet," she murmured, "within reach of your hand was life. I cannot understand."

"No," he said, "only those who have lived much in the jungle *can* understand." . . . He paused for a moment, then he continued softly, "And now Coningsby is dying. The man who has given the best years of his life to danger lies dying in quiet old New York. He often told me that he hoped to die in the jungle. Once when he saw an old truck-horse stricken in the street, Coningsby declared that he envied the old fellow, for he had died in harness. But none of Coningsby's hopes ever materialized. He always fought and worked like a man, but he never received a man's reward."

By the tone in which Jerold Wharton spoke, Olga Fullerton knew that he implied more than he had said.

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"Simply, that Coningsby loves you," he declared quietly, with a terrible simplicity. "He is calling you to come."

She started back at his words as though she had been struck.

"But I do not love him!" she gasped weakly, and her words seemed to choke her.

"No," said Jerold Wharton. "Men like Coningsby,

women admire but they do not love. I sometimes think they are not big enough to understand great things. All his life Coningsby's lived and suffered without the love of women. Now he must die as he has lived."

Olga put her hands up to her eyes.

"Oh, I can't stand it," she sobbed brokenly. "You make me feel as though I were killing him."

"No," he said tenderly, "you are not killing him. You could not save him if you would. But you could prevent his dying *that way!*"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Go to Coningsby."

"If I did," she faltered, "he would think I loved him."

"Yes," said he, "he would think you loved him and in that thought he would be wonderfully happy."

"But I do not love him."

"No, but you can act. I have seldom seen a better emotional actress. Now you have an opportunity to play your greatest rôle. Again you have an opportunity to play 'The Better Self,' only this time you must write your own part before you play it. Coningsby cannot live and will never know. . . . Will you go to him?"

She rose to her feet and her eyes shone with a strange brilliancy. "I will go to him," she said softly. "I could almost love *you* for what you have done tonight."

While she went to get her wraps, Jerold Wharton waited for her upon the balcony. He lighted a cigar

and, as he puffed dreamily, the last sentence she had uttered came back to him, "I could almost love you for what you have done to-night."

He sighed wearily.

"Dear girl," he said, "if she only could."

II.

Slowly Coningsby opened his eyes. His head throbbed with fever and he could scarcely see. The room was almost in darkness; the shades were drawn, creating a restful twilight of peace. Over in one corner he could just dimly make out the lines of his favorite gun. How many times he had carried that gun through the untrodden trails of the dark continent. As he lay there, half-conscious, he remembered the first lion he had slain in East Africa. That was over a dozen years ago, but it seemed like yesterday. One of the native porters had been entrapped by the frenzied animal. In one spring, unexpectedly, the lion was upon him, virtually slashing the poor fellow to ribbons. Arthur Coningsby had heard the Swahili's wild, unearthly screams, screams which seemed to bite into the soul, and in a moment he was rushing to his assistance. For an instant Coningsby gazed upon the sight in horror. Then he raised his rifle and fired once. With a mighty roar which seemed to be echoed by the whole forest, the stricken beast rose to its haunches, blood dripping from its horrible jaws. It made one great bound toward Coningsby, then rolled over dead.

All this time the Swahili had not moved. After

making certain that the lion was dead, Coningsby went and knelt by the side of the porter. As he knelt there, silent in the terrible solitude, Jerold Wharton came upon him.

"He was my favorite carrier," said Coningsby simply.

"And you arrived too late," Wharton had declared without any trace of emotion.

"Perhaps," was the calm reply, "but I lessened his agony by a fraction." As he spoke he turned the poor fellow over on his back and showed a bullet wound which was clotted with sickening blood.

"I did not shoot to kill the lion," said Coningsby, and there the matter had ended.

When news of the incident filtered back to civilization, Coningsby had been severely criticized by many. But probably no one summed up the matter so well as did Jerold Wharton.

"To judge of a man's actions in the jungle," he had declared curtly, "one must live in the jungle."

Now as Arthur Coningsby lay, racked by a terrible fever, all this flamed out in his mind in startling vividness. Fever sometimes dulls a man's faculties but it often intensifies his memory. Thus was its affect upon Coningsby. As he thought of these things a great longing to hold the old gun in his hands once again overcame him. With a half-audible groan of pain, he turned to ring for his man-servant and gazed full into the face of Olga Fullerton.

For a moment he gazed at her speechless, then he slowly closed his eyes.

"Dreams, dreams," he murmured wanly.

An unaccountable tear-drop slipped from Olga Fullerton's eye and rolled softly down her cheek. She placed her cold, soft hand upon his fever-scorched forehead. Then slowly he opened his eyes again, which shown with a glorious light of hope.

"Tell me," he said weakly, longingly, "is it true?"

"Yes," she replied in a voice which she endeavored to keep firm, "it is true."

As she spoke she leaned down and touched her cold lips to his burning cheek.

After that almost every day Olga spent several hours by Coningsby's bedside, hours which he declared were made up of the most happy, glorious moments of his life. One day he said to Jerold Wharton:

"Jerry, I am making up for the wasted years, the years which contained no love. And do you know somehow when a person doesn't love he is missing one of the really greatest things of life. Old man, take my advice and settle down."

As Coningsby spoke, Jerold Wharton had walked to the window, a terrible hunger gnawing at his heart. Yes, he needed love, the love of Olga Fullerton. Outside a sluggish, misty rain was falling. Everything looked dark and gloomy and the walks were paved with soggy mud. He smiled whimsically as he gazed out upon the dreary scene. All Nature, to him, seemed to accord with his mood. Presently he turned again to his friend, and now the look of sorrow had passed from his face.

"Conny, old man," said he, "I reckon some men were born to be loved by women, others to be wedded to their work. Down in the jungle is the place where I belong, the region where a man can fight against odds and forget he has a soul."

Coningsby lay with closed eyes. So long did he lay thus, Jerold Wharton commenced to think he were sleeping. Finally he asked softly, "Can a man forget?"

The simple sentence seemed to have a strange effect upon Jerold and he was glad that the eyes of his friend were closed so that he could not see his face. He gripped the arms of his chair, unconsciously, so tightly that his fingers turned white.

"A man *can* forget," said he, "when he *must*."

At the moment both were thinking of Olga, but their thoughts were entirely different.

As the weeks rolled on Coningsby showed no improvement. Neither did his condition become any worse. Day after day passed by without apparent change, until at last Jerold Wharton began to have hope. When he approached the Doctor on the subject, the physician gravely shook his head.

"Cases like his always remind me of a lighted match," said he. "Bright for a moment then plunged in darkness, as the flame is quenched by a puff of wind. So will it be with Coningsby. He may live a month, and on the other hand, he may not last through the night."

And Jerold had returned to his rooms, plunged back again into the valley of sadness, all hope dead within him.

Meanwhile Olga Fullerton sat by Coningsby's bedside.

"You simply *must* get well!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," was the quick reply, "I must get well. Before it didn't really matter, but things are different now."

As Coningsby spoke, Olga thought of the words which Jerold Wharton had used that night upon the balcony.

"He always fought and worked like a man, but he never received a man's reward."

Impulsively she stooped and kissed his lips.

"With medicine like that every day," he declared, "I could get well in a week."

A few days later, as Olga Fullerton was about to enter Coningsby's room, she met the Doctor coming out. Doctor Richmond took her by the arm and patted her gently on the shoulder. His stern old face was wreathed in smiles as he announced:

"Girl, I have good news. Coningsby seems much improved. I think Jerold Wharton was right after all. He is going to get well. But why I do not know, I do not know."

Olga Fullerton's face had grown very white. As the doctor was about to comment upon it, she hastened to say:

"The shock of your words is so great that it has indeed quite taken my breath away."

"I appreciate your feelings," agreed the old doctor quickly, "the shock must indeed be great."

But how great it was, Doctor Richmond did not know.

III.

That night Olga Fullerton could not sleep. She lay and tossed upon her pillow in an agony of wakefulness, tortured by thoughts which she simply could not put from her. Her head throbbed dully and she felt as though her body were being slowly consumed by an inward fire. What should she do? A thousand times she asked herself this question, but could find no solution. The night seemed to bear down upon her with a fatalistic pressure. She felt as though she were in the grip of hopeless things. As she lay there, tortured by a mental anguish which she could scarcely bear, the words Jerold Wharton had used on that never-to-be-forgotten night at the Waddington's recurred to her as though the very blackness were shouting them in her ears: "You can't overcome Destiny, but you can change it."

"Poor boy," she whispered softly, "one can't do either, but he did not know."

And then she rose from her bed and stole to the window. Softly she lifted the shade, flooding the room with a glorious wave of silvery moonlight. For a moment she stood gazing at the surrounding peaceful country in silence. Somewhere in the distance an owl hooted dismally. She shivered slightly. On the very outskirts of a great metropolis she felt very

much alone. If only she had someone to comfort her, someone in whom she could confide.

Down in the room below, Arthur Coningsby lay sleeping peacefully. He was going to get well. Her coming had probably saved his life. Somehow she wondered whether she had any *right* to save his life under those conditions.

A leaf crackled in the garden below, then a match was struck and it seemed as though someone were lighting a cigar. The next moment the figure of a man appeared in the moonlight. Up and down he walked, restlessly up and down on a trail that led from nowhere and did not have an end.

Even in the moonlight Olga had no difficulty in recognizing Jerold Wharton. Back and forth he walked, puffing nervously at his cigar, ever back and forth.

"Dear boy," she murmured wistfully, "I wonder which is the most unhappy—you or I."

Then she stole noiselessly back to bed and found sleep at last. For now it seemed as though she were no longer alone in her trouble.

* * * * *

When Olga Fullerton awakened, dawn was just breaking through the mists of morning, painting a light of gladness over the distant palisades. Quickly she dressed and stole down into the garden.

Jerold Wharton still paced restlessly back and forth under the trees. At her approach he glanced up with a start, as though her coming had summoned him back from a dream world.

"You are out early," said he finally, with a cordial smile.

"Yes," she murmured simply, "I could not sleep."

"Nor I," said he. "I have been up for several hours, walking restlessly back and forth from place to place. Like 'The Wandering Jew,' my soul can find no rest."

"And I too have been most miserable," she declared with quivering voice. "Have you heard? Arthur is going to live."

"Yes," he replied in a voice so low that it was almost drowned by the breeze in the treetops, "you have saved his life."

At his words, so earnestly, yet so tenderly spoken, the tears rose in her eyes at last, and her slender form shook with uncontrollable sobs. Jerold Wharton could not speak. A woman's tears will sap the strength from even the strongest of men. Silently he took her into his arms, and drew her head to his breast. He could not trust himself to speak. And that moment was the saddest of his life. Although she stood in an attitude of surrender, he knew that she did not realize it. He was just a friend in trouble. So he fought back the impulse to crush her in his arms, to hold her to him and never let her go.

"She is not for me," he kept repeating fiercely to himself, "she is not for me."

When at last the sobs had grown fainter, and he could control his voice, Jerold said wistfully:

"Little woman, as soon as Coningsby is strong enough, you must tell him the truth; but not until



then, for it will be a terrible blow indeed." As he spoke, he inwardly cursed himself for a meddling fool.

IV.

As the days sped by, Coningsby's condition steadily improved until at last he was entirely out of danger. Soon he was able to sit up, and eventually a morning came, warm and beautiful, when he could go out into the garden.

In front of the house, down near the river, stood a summer-house, delightfully charming, almost hidden beneath the maze of climbing vines and flowers which scrambled up the moss-covered logs on every side. From this little retreat, the house could not be seen, and in no matter whatsoever direction one turned no sign of life was visible; nothing save hills and river and sky. Of course there were homesteads, hidden by the trees, only a very short distance away, but as these were not apparent they did not disturb the soft, cool harmony of repose.

Often as Coningsby sat in the summer-house, Olga read books to him, stories which he seldom heard, so intent was he in gazing on the face of the reader and dreaming of the future. Daily Olga said, "I must tell him the truth to-morrow." But ever she put off the confession, for she could not summon up sufficient courage.

One morning, out in the summer-house, Coningsby said: "A year ago to-day, I stood upon the banks of a river in East Africa and cursed the jungle because

it was *not* civilized and the city because it *was* civilized. You probably wonder at such a pessimistic attitude, and to-day I am surprised myself. But then the declaration seemed sane enough. For five months our little band of explorers had been seeking for a man named Warburton who had gone down into the Rana country and never returned. I could fill a book with the horrible tortures we endured on that journey. An epidemic of a particularly malignant native disease broke out among our carriers. For almost a week one was buried each morning just before sunrise. And yet, in spite of everything, we kept plodding steadily forward. As long as one man remained alive, he would see that expedition to completion. That is the law of the wild. Death alone can make a man give up the fight, not the death of others, but the death of himself. Thus, as I say, for five months we had lived like dogs. Nothing kept us alive but our own will power. It seemed as though all the horrors of earth were concentrated in that terrible march of death. And every morning a Somali uttered a sickening groan and pitched forward on his face, to rise no more. But finally a day came which marked the end of our quest. We found Warburton—a filthy, maudlin, drunken wreck—married to a native woman more beastlike than himself. And this was what my brave men had fought and died to save! Warburton refused to return with us, but he begged me to send a barrel of liquor to him as soon as I reached Nairobi. As I looked at the miserable, shaking, cringing derelict, my brain seemed on fire.

with hatred, hatred of the law of evolution which raised man up from the brute-strength age, only to sink him further down until he was less than a beast! As I stood on that river-bank, I thought of that grim, solemn chain of graves stretching back through the gloomy forest, and my heart was very bitter." . . . Coningsby paused for a moment, before he continued softly:

"But all that happened over a year ago. And what a wonderful change has come over me since then. I feel as though, like Pygmalion's statue, I have for the first time been endowed with life; that previously I was but a thing of stone. Last night I sat in my room stretched out in a great armchair. Save for the joyful flame of my cigar, the room was in total darkness. And yet in every shadowy corner I seemed to see your figure hiding, only visible when the tip of the cigar glowed bright. And in the smoke I drew pictures. Poets may eulogize on the reveries of a bachelor, but I tell you, girl, they don't begin to compare with the reveries of a man in love."

As Coningsby spoke, he leaned down and touched his lips to the tips of her fingers. Olga Fullerton sat speechless, her face almost as white as the roses growing in the garden. She wanted to tell him the truth and yet she seemed almost powerless.

"Oh, you mustn't do that!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling with emotion.

Coningsby laughed merrily. "Mustn't?" he chuckled. "Why then I suppose I mustn't do this either?" And he seized her in his arms and stifled her with kisses.

She did not resist; she did not seem to have sufficient strength.

"Oh, you don't understand," she moaned, "you don't understand."

Something in her tone made him draw back as though he had received a blow.

"Why, what do you mean?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

And then, although it tore her heart to do it, she told him the truth.

"I am an actress," she murmured helplessly. "I have been only acting all the time. But please don't misunderstand me," she continued quickly, as he made as though to interrupt. "I did not do it because I wanted to, but simply because I thought you would not live. In its bare simplicity, the fact seems brutal, and yet——"

She broke off abruptly. "Oh, I can't explain!" she sobbed brokenly. "But I *couldn't* go on this way forever."

Coningsby belonged to that class of men who are born to suffer in silence, the class who bear their troubles alone. With a visible effort he pulled himself together.

"Tell me," he said, and his voice sounded strangely hollow, "when did all this begin?"

"On the night of the Waddington's ball," she replied slowly. "I had slipped out onto the balcony after one of the dances, and there I met Jerold Wharton. He told me that you could not live, and that you were calling me to come. As I listened to his

words my heart was touched and I came to you at once."

After a momentary silence, he said: "At least, I can always remember the great goodness of heart which prompted you to come to me."

"Don't misunderstand," she replied wistfully. "It was not I who suggested my going to you. It was the plan of Jerold Wharton."

For a while he sat in silence, his face cold and colorless. Minutes passed and still he did not speak. Finally Olga Fullerton could bear the terrible strain no longer.

"You are angry," she whispered. "I do not blame you. I have acted shamefully."

He smiled wanly.

"No," he said wearily, "I am not angry, for you have given me a few months of the really greatest things of life. Before you came to me, I had nothing to look back upon save work and nothing to look forward to. Now, the future is the same, but the past is made beautiful by the presence of wonderful memories."

He took her hand in his and looked into her eyes, dim with tears. "Before I go," said he very softly, "I wonder if you will kiss me once."

* * * * *

Back at the house, in his own room, Jerold Wharton was playing the "Serenata." Softly his fingers wandered listlessly over the keys. And thus it happened that at the self-same moment both he and Coningsby were thinking of that memorable night on which he

had talked with Olga Fullerton upon the balcony. He was interrupted in his reveries by a step in the room behind him.

"Jerry, old man, I am going back into the jungle," said a strangely hollow voice, speaking at his elbow. "Do you want to go along?"

And Jerold Wharton answered simply, "Yes." But he did not glance up, for when one has lived much in the tropics one learns to understand men.

V.

A month later, Arthur Coningsby dined with Colonel Mowbray in the European Club at Zanzibar. Outside through the narrow, filthy lanes which served as streets, throngs of people were hastening to and fro. Here all the world seemed to have come to rub shoulders against each other. Englishman cursed Arab, and Arab raved at Hindi. In some of the dimly lighted, odorous alleys steaming black and yellow bodies and kinky heads were struggling excitedly with one another, jabbering and shrieking in a dozen different tongues. From the tops of tall, flat-roofed houses floated strains of weird, dreamy music, which rose ever and anon above the laughing, chattering voices of the hidden merry-makers. The entire disjointed, unsystematic mass united to form a wondrous weird and wavering picture of color. White, dust-tinted houses, cobbled streets fallen into ruin, alcoves dark and mysterious with flickering yellow lights gleaming in the distance; frightfully miserable hovels; gorgeous palaces—how can one describe the strangely wild, fantastic, fascinating sight? Porters sitting cross-legged before the entrances to forbidden gardens; merchants reclining amongst their wares at the truly beautiful bazaars. And what wares are here for sale! Ivory, gum-copal, hides, lumber, silk rugs and

cotton cloth; cloves, chillies, kanikies, machetes; in fact almost everything purchasable in the Occident—and more, for where is there any place which has such a spell of romance as that awesome, terrible land bordering on the Equator?

But within Colonel Mowbray's private room at the European Club all the splendid, jumbled maze of sweat and color was forgotten. For, as the two men sat and smoked their cigars, Mowbray was speaking earnestly, reminiscently, as though he were putting his very soul into his words.

"Several years ago," said he, "I was a curator in the employ of 'The National Zoological Society,' and was commissioned to accompany an expedition into the heart of the Kermashan Valley in British East Africa in quest of specimens of certain rare poisonous snakes for the London Museum. It is claimed by experts that there are more varieties of reptiles in this locality than in any other region in the world. Well, at length, after much calculating, purchasing and the wasting of much midnight oil, I set out on my journey with most of the paraphernalia necessary for such an expedition. In the course of several weeks I arrived at Mombasa, where the final arrangements were to be completed. In this town, at the Sports Club, I met Morris Warburton, an Englishman, who was to lead the expedition. He at once set about hiring fifty Swahili carriers, which took him several days, but at length everything was ready, and a fortnight later we were well on our way to the valley of snakes.

"Now it is necessary to say here that, although the Swahilis are a very brave people, they have a hereditary, superstitious dread of the Kermashan Valley. Warburton was aware of this and had hired them without their knowing our destination. They were not long to remain in ignorance of it, however, as following events soon proved, for one night, while half-intoxicated, Warburton blabbered all. The Swahilis said nothing, at which I was greatly surprised, but when morning came the silence was explained, for there was not the vestige of a carrier in sight. Fear had gotten the better of them and, while we slept, they had headed back for Mombasa. A good opportunity was now presented me to upbraid Warburton, and no doubt I would have done so had it not been for an acute pain which I suddenly became aware of in my right ankle. The next instant I heard a low, hissing sound and turned just in time to see an ugly red-black snake glide away into the bushes. As my eye fell upon it, my face blanched, for I realized that I had been inoculated with a terrible poison.

"As I recall that day, I shiver even now at the bare remembrance, for memory brings back a terrible picture. . . . I see before me a clearing in the great, impenetrable African forest about five hundred miles inland from Mombasa. It is noonday, but it is almost as dark as night. Overhead the foliage, creepers and branches unite to form a natural roof of verdure. The forest is uncanny and filled with weird, fearsome noises. The buzzing of millions of insects, the Satanic screeching of countless flesh-eating animals, and the

hissing of venomous, poisonous snakes gliding stealthily through the grass on their unholy errands of death—these are the sounds which haunt the heart of the jungle. Ever and anon there comes a crack like the report of a gun and a great tree totters over and falls to the ground, a victim to the onslaughts of armies of deadly white ants, which, though insignificant in size, are yet strong enough to conquer these monstrous kings of the forest.

“In the dim twilight the jungle presents a wonderful blending of magnificence and awefulness, for it is simply teeming with lovely flowers—vampires, beautiful but deadly poisonous. Dainty orchids, fresh as the cheek of a maiden in winter-time and delicate as fairy gossameres, spring from cracks in the huge black tree trunks, and around these same trunks twine hideous reptiles of a reddish-black color, like the one which had imbedded its deadly fangs in my ankle. . . . It was in the centre of this clearing that Warburton and I had spent the night. At the moment to which my thoughts return, I reclined against a tree. My face was ashen-gray; my lips colorless. Warburton stood above me, apparently in the best of health save for a slight nervousness which was barely perceptible.

“‘You are sure you cannot walk?’ he asked anxiously.

“‘Positive,’ I replied faintly.

“‘Not even a little way?’

“‘Not a step.’

“‘But we must push on!’ he burst out.

“I made no answer, but closed my eyes, for I was

very tired. In a few moments I was asleep. How long I remained so, I do not know, but it must have been for several hours, for when I awoke it was night and I was alone.

"'Warburton!' I cried huskily, a great horror clutching at my heart. 'Warburton!' But no voice answered me. Gradually the truth dawned upon me. Warburton had deserted. He had followed the Swahilis. I was now quite alone, yet not entirely alone either, for I still had my dog with me, a great faithful Dane. I was reminded of his presence even as the full force of my comrade's desertion fell upon me, for he came and shoved his cold, damp nose into my face.

"Well, that night was a night of terrors, and only by a miracle was my life preserved. Hour after hour I lay and listened in indescribable fear to the thousands of vicious voices of the wild. The very air seemed alive, and the blackness was filled with myriads of gleaming, shining eyes. A cold sweat broke out on my body and I succumbed to the terrors of the forest. And all night long the great Dane kept watch over me."

Colonel Mowbray lapsed into silence and for some moments neither spoke. The spell of the African jungle seemed to have fallen over the room.

From the alleys the jabbering of Hindi porters and Arab merchants still filtered faintly to their ears. Somewhere down below, Watson, the club accountant, was crooning a well-known song. But under the prevailing conditions the words sounded strangely weird and uncanny.

*"I'm hitting the trail that leads, boys,
Away from the howling noise,
Away from a host of mem'ries
And a thousand worthless joys;*

*I'm off at last to the land, boys,
Where there isn't a single friend,
For no white man can live, boys,
In the place where the fevers blend."*

As the voice died away in a plaintive echo, Mowbray continued his story.

"I see another picture," he said slowly. "It is of a little native village. The inhabitants wear but a single strip of cloth about their waists, and strings of leopards' claws adorn their necks. They are rather odd-looking people; very black, very short and very broad. Their faces are extremely ugly, almost all nose and lips; the former spreading itself over the entire upper part of the face and the latter performing the same service for the lower part. It was among these natives that I found myself when I again regained consciousness. I was lying on a mattress of leaves in a rude mud hut near the centre of the village. But my dog was nowhere in sight, and though I sought and inquired everywhere, I never found him again. Down there in that terrible forest he had paid the price of duty."

Again Mowbray paused as though to get control of his voice. He drew his hand wearily across his eyes. Sitting there in the dim lamplight, his face looked

intensely haggard and drawn. But presently he continued his story and now his voice was firm again.

"For several weeks I remained at the little native village and was nursed by the people back to health again. As time sped by I picked up a smattering of their jargon and was able to converse a trifle with them, employing signs as much as possible. In this way, I discovered that several young warriors, while out hunting, had found me delirious two miles from the village and had carried me back with them. And thus the weeks rolled on until finally one day I fitted out an expedition from the native supplies and returned to Mombasa accompanied by some forty native porters whom I had prevailed upon to accompany me. The journey was uneventful and it was with a feeling of devout thanksgiving that I again beheld the friendly façade of the Sports Club. . . . For the following month my mind was filled with nothing but revenge and an insane desire took root in my mind. I must find Warburton. If it cost me my life I must find him. And then, abruptly, almost in a day, he slipped from my mind entirely, for I met the one woman in the world whom I could love. Down in the jungle by the side of my camp-fire, in the dark of the evening, I used to smoke my pipe and reverize. 'Smoke and dreams,' I often murmured. 'Neither is more tangible than vapor. Smoke stays for a moment, then vanishes into nothingness. And dreams—Good dreams don't come true, only the nightmares materialize.' But now all this was changed, for at last a dream had come true. A few months later I

was married to the dearest, sweetest woman in the world. Her name was Liane Warburton, sister of the comrade who had deserted me down there in the jungle."

"That was rather an odd coincidence," declared Coningsby, breaking into the conversation for the first time."

"Yes," replied Mowbray, "extremely odd. But I never told my wife the truth, nor would I have her know for the world. In the old days she thought a great deal of Morris, and if she knew the truth it would break her heart. And now for the first time since that day I have heard news of Warburton. He is somewhere down in the Rana Country in East Africa. He has no supplies and he cannot come back. At present he is staying at a little native village. Someone must go down and bring him back. I cannot go, for he would not trust me after what has happened. As I pondered over the problem, I thought of you. . . . I want you to go down into the Rana country and find Warburton, no matter what it costs, you must find him, and when you do you must tell him that for his sister's sake, all is forgotten."

A few hours later the contracts had been duly signed and sworn to, and Coningsby returned to his own rooms in the same building feeling happier than he had been for weeks. For now he had a great work to do, down in the country where a man must work like a man.

* * * * *

Late that evening Coningsby entered Jerold Wharton's room.

"Jerry, old man," he said simply, "I want you to read this." And he held out a sheet of paper, one of the pages of a letter.

Jerold took it and as he read, he recognized Olga Fullerton's handwriting.

"When you were gone I felt strangely lonesome. Nothing seemed to interest me. I went up to my sister's home in Sharon for a few weeks, but I felt so lonesome that I had to return. Up in my room the other night I sat by the window and thought the matter over. And as I sat there, I realized the truth at last. Since I have been with you during your illness, you came to mean more to me than I had realized. When two persons are thrown constantly together for any length of time they must needs either bore or grow to think a great deal of each other. And, Conny, you did not bore me. . . . Won't you come back? . . . Next week I am opening my third season in 'The Better Self,' and every night as I play the part, I will be thinking of you." . . .

As Jerold Wharton finished reading, he glanced up, and though his lips were smiling his eyes seemed strangely sad.

"And now, of course, you will go back," he whispered slowly.

"No," replied Coningsby, "I *can't* go back."

And then he repeated the story which Mowbray had told to him. He dwelt upon the terrors of the Ker-

mashan Valley; the insects, the poisonous snakes, the heat and fear.

"And this fellow Warburton," he finished slowly, "is the same man whom we went in search of, up into the Rana Country over a year ago, the miserable, drunken wreck of a beast whom we found married to the native woman. Don't you realize, old man, what a disgrace it would be to Liane Warburton if the truth ever became known? No other white men must ever find Warburton save you and I. I couldn't go back to Olga if I left this task unfinished. Maybe some day I will return, and she will be still waiting. Who knows but that at last I will find the happiness I have longed for all my life."

"Yes," said Jerold Wharton wistfully, "who knows?"

VI.

As the music of the dance ceased, Olga Fullerton stole, unnoticed, out onto the balcony of the great house overlooking the Hudson. Precisely as she had done a year before, she sank down upon a divan with a sigh of weariness. All night the dance had been in progress at the home of the Waddingtons and now it was almost dawn.

She gazed wistfully out over the softly rippling water lapping drowsily among the rocks of the palisades. Over the great rock wall the moon was softly rising, throwing the entire river into delightful shadow.

It seemed as though it were that same wonderful night upon which she had talked with Jerold Wharton upon this same balcony over a year before, and as her thoughts returned through the solemn halls of memory, she murmured wistfully: "Thus does history repeat itself."

"Yes," said a voice speaking at her elbow, "thus does history repeat itself."

With a nervous start, her face pale with surprise, she gazed up into the eyes of Jerold Wharton.

"I arrived only a short while ago," he explained quickly, "and as soon as I heard of the dance at the Waddingtons, I came here at once."

"I had not known you were coming back," she faltered reproachfully. "I heard no word from you. Why didn't you let me know?"

He smiled whimsically.


"I wished to take you by surprise," said he.

"Well, you certainly have done that," she declared. . . . "And Arthur—— Did he come with you?"

"No," said Jerold softly. "Here as I spoke to you of Coningsby one year ago to-night, I have come to speak again."

And then Jerold Wharton commenced his story. He told of the meeting with Mowbray at the European Club, of the contract and of the mission upon which they had gone down into the Rana Country.

"For a month," he said, "we pushed forward into the forest on an uneventful march. Daily we saw nothing but gnarled and matted trees and vines and sometimes a patch of sunlight. To say that the hours were monotonous would be putting it mild. They were nerve-racking; nothing but scorching, merciless heat, and the sound of a hundred bare, black feet tramping doggedly on through the forest. Thus, as I say, we pushed on toward the Rana Country for a month and nothing happened. Nightly, we prayed that something would occur to break the dreadful monotony. And then suddenly our prayer was heard and answered. One morning Coningsby awakened with a slight headache, his appetite was gone and all day he ate practically nothing, just marched gloomily along without uttering a word. By evening he was down with a raging fever and by morning he was out



ot his head. All night I sat by his side down there in that terrible forest and listened to his ravings about the things back home. 'She's waiting for me!' he kept murmuring dully. 'Oh, God, if I could only get to the light! She's waiting for me by the light!' And then he would struggle to a sitting posture, and I would have to fight with him to keep him from rushing off into that frightful maze of jet-black forest. And then again he would grow more calm. 'She's waiting for me, Jerry,' he would say, 'back home on the banks of the Hudson she is waiting for me. I can see her now sitting in the Crow's Nest on Eagle Crag gazing to the East, always to the East.' Then he would slip off into silent unconsciousness and lie for almost half an hour as though dead, apparently not breathing at all. Once I thought he was gone for sure, his hands seemed growing stiff. But even as I grasped them, he murmured: 'I couldn't return to her with my work unfinished, could I, Jerry? She's been faithful to me and I've got to be faithful to her.' Thus all through the night he raved, and I sat and listened by his side.

"Toward morning the heat intensified and it seemed as though we were being scorched in the oven of a great, horrible blast furnace. But finally dawn broke faintly through rifts in the huge tree-tops above our heads. And almost immediately I gave orders to the native porters to break camp. In about an hour we had turned and started back toward Zanzibar. Four Swahilis carried Coningsby swung in a hammock across their shoulders. I wish I could describe to

you the events of that fearful morning. Picture if you can the silent trails of the jungle, dark as twilight, although it was early morning. Through the grim forest fifty natives push their way, loaded with supplies and the necessary camp implements. And among that motley throng only two white men, one lying in a hammock burning with fever, cursing and raving in a manner truly frightful. Sometimes he would break out into prayer or song, and sometimes he talked sadly of the girl he loved back home. Hardened explorer though I am, I more than once found a tear rising in my eyes as I listened to his ravings. By noon, the fever had gone down a trifle and he recovered consciousness. Almost the first thing he asked weakly was, 'Where are we going?' He drew his hand wearily across his eyes as he spoke as though to bring memory out into sharper detail. 'Back to Zanzibar,' said I. 'You are very sick and we must find a doctor.' At my words, Coningsby closed his eyes, and uttered a heart-rending groan. 'Jerry, old man,' he said, in a voice so low that I could scarcely hear the words, 'I never thought that *you* could fail in your duty.' That was all, for the next moment he had slipped back into delirium and was cursing me like a fiend. Standing down there in the forest, one lone white man by the side of my comrade, it seemed to me as though God had given him a moment's consciousness that he might remind me of Colonel Mowbray, our contract and you.

"I knew as I stood there that Coningsby would never return to you if he left this task unfinished.

When the noonday meal was over we again turned our backs on the way that led to Zanzibar and set out for the Rana Country. Live or die, we would never again set foot in Zanzibar unless our quest was successful. And as we marched steadily onward I swore to God, that if Coningsby died I would complete the work which he had left unfinished."

Somewhere among the palms in the ballroom beyond them, a violinist was playing Moskovitz's "Serenata," the same one who had played on that other night a year before, when they had sat out upon the balcony. Softly, sweetly, grandly it floated to their ears like veritable dream music. Now loud, now soft and calm, it fell upon the night, and somehow to the two upon the balcony it seemed sadly beautiful. Not till the last note had died away did Jerold Wharton continue his story.

"Fortune was good to Coningsby," said he, "for in a few weeks the fever had practically left him and he was his old optimistic self again. Another month slipped by and we arrived at the little native village which we sought in the Rana Country. But we arrived too late, for Warburton was dead. He had been killed by the chief of the tribe into which he had married. His death was the result of a blow which he had struck in a drunken, murderous rage. In the Rana Country he who strikes the chief must pay the penalty. Warburton had paid the price of ingratitude.

"'It is probably just as well,' declared Coningsby, 'that we arrived too late. If Warburton had lived, he

would eventually have disgraced his sister. But as it is, she must never know. We will tell her that he lost his life endeavoring to save a native lad from drowning. Deacons may rant about the gorgeous purity of truth, but as for me, I admire the man who tells a lie, when he does it to save a soul from pain.'

"We traded beads and petty nicknacks for the few remaining possessions of Warburton, then turned our backs upon the village with a sigh of relief, for we had not failed in the work which we had set out to do. A few months later, as we neared Zanzibar, Coningsby was again struck down by the fever, and for the remainder of our journey back he raved deliriously. Now he lies in his room at the European Club, patiently waiting for the fever to abate, when he is not raving in delirium. Almost the moment we arrived at the club he bade me come to you and tell you that he will leave for New York as soon as he is strong enough to make the voyage. Probably at this very moment he is engaging a berth upon a steamer, and will be with you in a very few weeks."

"Oh, Jerry," she cried, rising to her feet, "not that! It isn't true."

"Yes," said Jerold, his throat strangely dry, "it is true."

"But he mustn't come back!" she exclaimed frantically. "Oh, my God, what shall I do? You don't understand, Jerry. I am only an actress still. I have failed in my love of Coningsby."

"No," said Jerold tensely, "I believe I do not understand." He gripped her wrist brutally. "Tell me,"

he demanded hoarsely, "what do you mean? How have you failed?"

"I am married," she said with a fatalistic calmness. "A month ago, I married Harry Ramsdell, who plays the part of the brother in 'The Better Self.'"

Jerold Wharton released her wrist, and when he spoke his voice sounded strangely hollow. "I wonder how you have the courage to act that play now," said he.

For a moment, both were silent. Then he murmured wistfully, "Poor old Coningsby. He always fought and worked like a man, but he never received a man's reward. Poor old Coningsby, he didn't deserve this."

VII.

Jerold Wharton sailed for England on the following morning. Restlessly he paced up and down the broad deck of the *Mauretania* as she slipped majestically down the river and solemnly out to sea. Soon nothing could be seen of the great skyscraper-shadowed city but a blur of golden mist. Other travellers stood and gazed with longing eyes as the city vanished into nothingness, but Jerold Wharton felt no pang of regret at leaving New York. His whole thought and mind was concerned solely with the news he was carrying back to Coningsby.

"Poor old Conny," he muttered wistfully. "Poor old Conny."

And then he went down into his own cabin and smoked cigar after cigar until far into the night, his mind a chaos of strangely conflicting emotions.

During his entire journey he kept entirely alone. His heart was full, and it was with a feeling of helpless sadness that he approached the shores of Zanzibar.

One morning as he came on deck, the continent of Africa loomed up before his gaze like the retreating shadow of night upon the horizon. Dhows floated drowsily in and out of the channel separating the island of Zanzibar from the mainland, their gray-

white sails hanging limp and dead as though they had succumbed to the humid, sultry, sweltering heat. Toward the South, just dimly discernable above the horizon, the smoke of a great German steamer was trailing away and blending into the sluggish, dull-gold mists. To the West, the masts of several tramp schooners stood out among the jumble of yachts and small native craft like the stumps of charred tree-trunks in the jungle.

As soon as possible, after the necessary evil of Custom's officials had been disposed of, Jerold Wharton was speeding down the main street of the town in the direction of the European Club.

As he entered the hall, he was met by the doctor.

"I'm glad you have arrived," said he brusksly, without any formal salutation whatsoever. "Coningsby is dying. He cannot live throughout the night. It is only a question of hours now. But he does not know. He thinks he is recovering. I have never believed in telling a patient that he cannot live."

As the doctor spoke, Jerold Wharton thought of the words which Coningsby had used in the jungle, during their last exploration together.

"Deacons may rant about the gorgeous purity of truth, but as for me, I admire the man who tells a lie when he does it to save a soul from pain."

"Poor old Conny," he muttered wanly. "Poor old Conny."

Then he said, addressing the doctor: "I suppose I may see him."

"Yes," was the quick reply. "If it doesn't do him

any good, it can't do him any harm, for nothing can save him now."

And then Jerold Wharton went up to Coningsby's room, which seemed coldly grim and dull, for the curtains were drawn to keep out the glaring light.

"Conny, old man," he said simply. "I've come back."

At his words, Arthur Coningsby opened his eyes. "The light is very bad," he moaned. "Oh, this terrible fever! I can scarcely see your face, and yet just to hear your voice, old man, is better than a pound of panacea." He paused for a moment, as though struggling for breath. Finally he managed to gasp: "And you saw Olga?"

"Yes," replied Jerold, and his voice shook. "She is waiting for you still. I wish you could have seen her face as I told her your story. It was a beautiful theme for an artist; so sadly sweet, yet wonderfully happy. 'Jerry,' she said softly, 'I am not surprised. Women expect great things from men like Arthur.'"

Coningsby's eyes were closed and his face looked blue and pinched. With a terrible feeling of dread Jerold put his ear down to his friend's heart. He could scarcely hear it beat.

"I'm going to get well," groaned Coningsby weakly. "Even since I have heard your words the fever seems to have abated." He was struggling painfully for breath. "Oh, but it is glorious to know that she is waiting, that I shall be with her in a month. Olga! Olga! home again——" His voice trailed away into an echo. "Home again at last." For a moment, he

was silent. Then suddenly he rose in his bed, with a cry of joy.

"Olga!" he gasped. "Olga! Why didn't Jerry tell me that you had come back with him?" His voice grew faint again. "Olga, home at last!"

With a sigh of unmistakable joy his head slipped back on the pillow. His face was wreathed in smiles, as though he had received a man's reward at last.

Meanwhile, back in New York, Olga Fullerton was portraying the part of "The Better Self" for the hundredth time. As the curtain fell at the close of the second act, an old white-haired Southerner turned to his wife.

"Magnificent acting," he declared. "She throws her very soul into her work."

"Yes," replied the grand old lady, "she is a born actress. She almost makes one feel as though she lives the part as she plays it."

Down in Zanzibar, from the balcony of the European Club, one lone man stood silently watching the sun set over the distant maze of gnarled and matted forest. Nine hours of darkness, and a new day would dawn. The world would slowly take up its endless duties as it had done for countless ages. On and on the days would go, but they would go without Coningsby.

Jerold Wharton bowed his head upon his hands as though crushed by the wheel of things. From somewhere in the garden below, Watson, the club account-

ant, was crooning his favorite song in a nasal monotone.

*"I'm hitting the trail that leads, boys,
Away from the crowded tune,
Away from the place called Life, boys,
And the sordid City's croon.*

*I'm off at last to the land, boys,
Where a worn-out soul can end—
For even God's unknown, boys,
In the place where the fevers blend."*

As the last word floated away in a wail, Jerold Wharton lifted his face, grim with determination. For now his mind was made up. It seemed as though he could hear the voice of the mystery trails calling him back into the jungle.

"Some men are born to be loved by women," he said wistfully, "others, to be wedded to their work."

He lighted a cigar, and as he puffed wearily he gazed thoughtfully into the smoke.

"Dreams, dreams," he murmured wanly. "Nothing but dreams."

BERENICE OF CONSTANTINE

I

Boyd Anniston lounged at the entrance to Abood Wali's Opium Den in the Bazaar of the Holy Eunuch in Kishm, idly smoking a Turkish cigarette and gazing listlessly at his surroundings. Here and there a huge Kurd, from the mountains of Northern Persia, strode savagely about, in striking contrast to the slow-moving, peaceful Armenians who shuffled aimlessly in and out of the fruit-stalls and coffee-houses, smoking hashysh and chattering idly among themselves in scarcely audible whispers.

He finished his cigarette, emitted a rather characteristic yawn, stretched his arms several times, and then, turning, set off at a brisk pace up one of the many narrow, crooked alleys of the town. Ever and anon, he stumbled over heaps of filth and garbage which are as plentiful in Kishm as sand in the Sahara. A short distance ahead he could hear the rabble of many infuriated voices. Soon he came to the main square of the town and beheld the cause of the disturbance. A Jew, small of stature, pale and anemic from malaria and fright combined, was suspended, head downward, by his feet from a rudely constructed

framework of poles, stripped naked to the waist, while two Musselmans laboriously beat him with heavy rushes till his back was striped with red and blue and his cries and shrieks rose above the clamoring of the spectators.

Anniston paused for a moment and gazed at the scene in silence. Then he elbowed his way through the motley throng till he reached the side of the little Jew. His right arm shot out several times, with telling effect, and the two Musselmans lost all ambition in life and sank to the ground.

The next moment he had flung several handfuls of small coin at the angry populace and while they scrambled about on the ground, cursing, fighting, struggling for the money, he cut the ropes that bound the Jew to the framework of poles and placed him on his feet. He was so weak and frightened that he could scarcely stand, and Anniston, noticing this, lifted him up on his shoulders like a bag of meal, and disappeared with his burden into the night.

"What those fools need is a leader!" he ejaculated as he strode off.

"Sahib," groaned the little Jew; "it is you who are the fool."

"I?" Anniston gasped in great surprise.

"Yes," was the reply. "According to the Koran, 'a fool is he who plunges into peril which he might avoid.'"

"If he wanted to."

"And do you not?"

"Not over much if there's adventure behind it."

"He who will not recognize the coming of danger is like unto a man who would rob his own house," quoted the Jew in a thin rasping voice.

"A very pretty quotation," commented Anniston dryly, "from a literary standpoint."

Half an hour later they were safe in the realms of Anniston's adobe house among the larches and oleanders, near the 'Great Mosque of the Zorastrians' and the 'Shrine of Ali Sharef,' an ancient philosopher-poet of Persia. Having assured himself that there was no longer cause for alarm, the little Jew began to breathe again. Anniston summoned an Arab servant, well versed in the art of medicine, who silently applied a cooling balsam to the son of Abram's burning, smarting, aching back, helped him into a bleached cotton coat which the American himself selected from amongst his own, and led him to a low, comfortable divan near one of the open windows.

Having made sure that he was as comfortable as possible, the Arab silently withdrew and Anniston was left along with the perfectly satisfied Jew.

He produced a jar of Egyptian tobacco and several pipes which he pushed toward the latter.

"I prefer the genuine weed," he said between puffs, "to the sickening hashysh of the natives."

"I am addicted to both," replied the other, selecting a fine specimen of meerscham and filling it slowly as he spoke.

For a few seconds they smoked in silence. Then Anniston said reflectively, blowing a wreath of smoke ecstatically from his lips, "We have been friends for

nigh two hours, yet I do not even know your name."

"I am Juma Mochanda," returned the other gravely, "a Jew from Damascus. . . . And you?"

"Boyd Anniston, of every place in general and no place in particular."

"Your words are rather ambiguous."

"Doubtlessly, yet they should be plain enough. Simplified, I mean that I am a confirmed globe trotter."

"In that respect we differ greatly, for I have not been out of Kishm in twenty years; not since I came to work for Menehem Sorcha in his island fortress; not since the days when his beautiful daughter, Berenice, was a tiny babe."

"Ah!" ejaculated Anniston eagerly. "Twenty years ago, she was a baby—that would make her still young. Who is she? Tell me about her? Is she married?"

"She is an Armenian, daughter of the master of the Isle of Constantine. Her home is about ten miles west of Kishm Island, a veritable castle, ancient as the ruins of the watchtower at Garanan, massive as the Citadel of Tabriz. She is as beautiful as Da Vinci's famous painting in the Louvre and of the same type—a sad, melancholy beauty. Most of her time she spends in the cupola of the ancient castle, gazing o'er the torrid waters, buried deep in thought. Seldom she comes to the mainland and then only heavily veiled, for she does not like to face the insolent stare of the low caste Indians and Persians."

Anniston's pipe had gone out unnoticed in his eagerness to hear Mochanda's words.

"Quite romantic," he observed. "It appears like the seed of a dormant romance."

"Every form of human life is romantic," quoth the other, settling back comfortably among the cushions, "but it takes a good eye to find the romance in it."

"Romance is the brother of Adventure. I have known the latter many years. Don't you think it would be a good idea to introduce me to the other member of the family?"

"You would have me take you to the Isle of Constantine?" burst out the Jew in great astonishment.

"Yes, to Berenice, the Mistress of the Island."

The little man paled discernably. "By the God that placed us both upon this earth, it is impossible," he said, trembling slightly. "I cannot. It would be dangerous, it might mean death."

"For me?"

"For every one of us."

"And Berenice?"

"Her fate would be the same as ours."

"That ends it. I am going with you!"

"Fool!"

Anniston lifted his eyebrows and his jaw grew firm.

"In sooth, I may be as you term me," he said angrily, "but I do not like to be reminded of the unpleasant fact too frequently, unless it be done in jest."

"I meant no offence," assured the other. "I did but speak the truth."

"As you yourself have construed it. It would not do for us all to have uniformity of opinion."



II

In the wee hours of the morning, as the mantle of darkness which enshrouded the drowsy Orient commenced to melt away, Boyd Anniston and the Jew, Mochanda, embarked on a heavy, crude gondola for the Isle of Constantine.

"It is for water that I come to Kishm," explained Mochanda, as they glided from the shore. "Beautiful as is our island," he continued reflectively, there is no fresh water upon it; nothing save stagnant sulphur pools, and springs reeking with alkali. We have a tiny stream which flows partly through the island, but the water is salty."

"That should not inconvenience you so greatly," drawled Anniston wearily. "Salt water is as good as fresh, for washing purposes."

"But we must drink."

"And would you drink water?"

"Certainly, Sahib, and do you not?"

Anniston shrugged his shoulders. "I have always considered it good enough to wash with," he rejoined, "but when I drink, I like to have flavor in the cup, a liquid with strength behind it."

Even as he spoke, the Armenian gondoliers drowsily lifted in their oars, and the boat grounded silently on

the coppery-colored, deserted beach of Constantine.

"We have arrived," stated Mochanda briefly. "Follow me. You have come against my wishes to the island—enough! If harm befall you, remember you were forewarned, and now will I lead you to the castle fortress and to Menehem Sorcha, my master."

Anniston followed silently, as the Jew led the way through a huge ravine, the hills rising on either side like great, grim walls. Far above, from lofty, overhanging crags, the fierce shrieks of vultures rose upon the air, and the echoes rumbled and bounded among the rocks, sounding uncanny in the morning solitude.

"Yonder," volunteered Mochanda, "is the castle."

Anniston gazed eagerly as directed, and was not dissatisfied with his first glimpse of the home of Berenice, a huge mass of brick and stone, blackened and marred by the elements for ages, the battlements rising more than a hundred feet in height, topped by large balconies and the cupola which Mochanda had already mentioned.

"It looks mighty ancient," commented Anniston enthusiastically.

"It is," was the reply. "Rumor has it that it was built in the seventeenth century by Meshad Bin, a cruel Kurd, who was driven from Persia by order of the Shah. He was a noted outlaw and collected the money with which he built the fortress from caravans held up on the highroad near Tabriz. Tales are told of his terrible cruelty, that he threw his prisoners from the battlements to be dashed to pieces on the jagged rocks below, and certainly it was the most

terrible of punishments, for the victims, seldom killed outright, were left to die in agony with the tropical noonday sun shining down mercilessly upon their unprotected bodies."

Mochanda stopped abruptly in his narration. They had reached the end of the valley. He gripped Anniston's shoulder.

"Is it not beautiful?" he asked.

Far in the distance, the faint, mist-covered hills of Kishm were dimly discernible above the fierce, fiery gleam of the Persian Gulf. Here and there stately sycamores, larches and oleanders swayed gently in the breeze. Patches of poppies, irises and carnations gave exquisite coloring to the picture. Beneath the cool, inviting shade of bushy palms flowed a tiny natural rivulet upon which a gondola gently glided, the gondoliers swaying rhythmatically with one accord.

Under the silken canopy which partially covered the center of the boat, a dark-haired maiden, dressed in a long white, clinging robe peculiar to the Orient, reclined lazily among velvet cushions, gazing listlessly out upon the waters.

"Behold my mistress, Berenice," whispered Mochanda, as the boat gradually approached. A moment later she had discovered them and ordered the gondoliers to row her to their side. Both men stood hatless as she alighted with the help of Mochanda's arm, and Anniston gazed open-mouthed and speechless at her frail, enchanting beauty. Her dress was simple, yet not without "some marks of costliness." Here and there over her long, loose-flowing robe hung

strings of fine pearls, "disposed with studied negligence." But Anniston beheld them not, for it was at her face he gazed, into her big, soft, thoughtful eyes, which seemed to reflect the beauty of her soul in their depths.

Anniston looked at her, feasted his eyes upon her, yet was he hungry. Love which had often smouldered in his heart now blazed forth in truth, and inwardly he vowed that they should wed; but his face was calm as Mochanda said, "Mistress Berenice, this is Boyd Anniston Sahib, a man of great strength, yet of bad judgment. Here has he come to meet you, O my Mistress!"

The American bowed and Berenice acknowledged his courtesy by inclining her head a trifle.

"It is a treat to have a visitor at Constantine," she said softly, and the musical vibration of her speech sent an electric thrill through Anniston's whole body. "Seldom do I get the opportunity of playing hostess, for we do not entertain Arabs, Turks or Persians, and, save for these, Kishm is scarcely inhabited. Enter the gondola with me and we will go to the castle."

Silently he helped her into the boat, and his hand shook slightly as he did so. Then he took the seat opposite her, under the canopy, and the gondoliers dropped their oars into the water and bent to their task.

III

Dinner that day was the most enjoyable which Anniston had ever partaken of. Old Menehem Sorcha, grim and grey, sat at the head of the finely carved teakwood table. The American sat on the left and Berenice on the right. All the other places were vacant. The dining room was picturesque to an extent: long, high-vaulted like the interior of a church, with thin slits for windows, through which the sunlight penetrated but dimly. To make amends for its absence, however, the ceiling was hung with numerous soft-toned lanterns with rims of hammered bronze. Many were of enormous size, and as Anniston gazed upon them, old Sorcha spoke:

"No doubt, you know, having resided in Persia for some time, that these lanterns carried in the street denote a person's rank. Sometimes they are thirty-six inches in height and over half as wide, so large, in fact, that it is not uncommon for a notable to be proceeded by a servant whose sole duty is to carry the lantern to light the way for his lord and master."

"'Tis a very strange custom," interjected Anniston, "but I have found that Persia has many oddities. The *dakmehs* of the Parsees, for instance. It seems very queer and barbaric to me to leave the dead exposed

on rafters, as they do, to the mercy of thousands of carnivorous vultures."

"Yet your method is just as cruel," interposed Sorcha. "You place your dead in the ground, to be slowly eaten by worms. The Parsees place theirs on rafters, to be pecked by birds. The end is quicker, but the result is the same in either case."

"I believe there is truth in what you say," commented the American, "but what difference how the body is consumed? After the soul has left it, 'tis as useless as so much clay."

Menehem made no rejoinder, and Anniston, nothing loth, resumed his eating and, likewise, his study of the room. The walls were hung with old tapestries and there were numerous pieces of Persian and Caucasian armour scattered here and there. The floor was covered with tiger skins and Daghistan rugs of rare beauty. Everything was soft colored and the harmonious blending of the different shades gave a resting, dreamy appearance to the room.

Soon the meal was ended and Menehem ordered kalyans to be brought. As he did so, Berenice excused herself and glided softly from the room. When the dishes had been removed and the tobacco lighted, he began, "Now is the time for the two of us to become acquainted. If we are to be friends, we must know each other better than we do at present. I will start by telling you, as Mochanda did, that you were foolish to come to Constantine."

"Why?" puffed Anniston laconically.

"It is dangerous."

The American smiled. "Mystery has always been my weak point," he observed; "you bid me beware the island and thus make a mystery of the danger at the start. 'Scenting mystery is like the first bite at a piece of scandal and holy souls do not wholly detest it.' I think I quote the words of Victor Hugo in 'Les Misérables.' If you want a person to leave you alone, don't arouse his curiosity. It's as useless as holding a piece of meat to a starving mongrel and commanding him not to eat."


Menehem Sorcha shrugged his shoulders. "Young men are generally venturesome," he observed. "I see you are no exception to the rule. However, there is no reason for keeping you any longer in ignorance of the facts, since you have come unbidden to the island, evidently intent to stay." He cleared his throat, puffed languidly at his kalyan several times as though in deep reflection, and then resumed, "A quarter of a century ago I, like you, was a wanderer. I had considerable money left me by an old uncle who had the good grace to die when I was a mere child, and finding myself rich and without family, I left Persia for East Africa. I joined a hunting expedition in Abyssinia, and one day we had the good luck to slay two monstrous elephants. As they lay dead, the party of hunters gathered around, commenting on their great size and estimating their value. One of the guides put the figure for the tusks alone down at twenty-five hundred ruppes. Instantly my interest was aroused, as likewise was the rest of the hunters'. 'How do you make that out?' I asked. 'Each one of those

tusks,' he said, 'extends about three and a half feet out of the head and probably two feet in. They average, I should judge, about seventy pounds each, and they're prime ivory worth about nine ruppes per pound. Pretty good for a morning's work,' he concluded. This statement put an idea in my mind, and one year later I opened a station in Italian Somaliland, where I traded with the natives for ivory which they brought from the interior. Sometimes I gave them cottons, often old rifles and petty knickknacks which I imported cheaply from England. In three years I had amassed a fortune and sold out to a European concern for a tidy sum. My negotiations with East Africa ended, I returned to Persia. I settled in Teheran, for it is the largest city, and I wanted to enjoy life and luxury.

"In every man's life," he continued thoughtfully, "at some time there comes a woman whom he thinks is his ideal, the pivot about which his life revolves. I was no exception; there was such a woman in my life. She was an Italian. Her name was Catherine Lucio. She was very beautiful, and as I looked upon her, I thought more beautiful than the best I had ever met, and I wondered that my life had not seemed empty before, without her, for she seemed to fill it so entirely. But her beauty was physical, not mental; it was rather of the face and body than the soul. She was one of those women incapable of love for love's sake; not a lover of men but of wealth and riches. From a man's first entrance into the world till the day of his death, he keeps moulding in his own mind the

ideal woman as a sculptor might mould the plaster caste which precedes the finished statue. Ever and anon, he keeps changing his ideal as the days speed by, perchance making her older, gayer or sadder as his moods and ideas develop and grow more mature. Till at last there comes a day when he meets her, as he supposes, a girl who resembles the one he has pictured in his mind. He sees the one and thinks of the other, till at length he recreates the two into one, the living one. But finally a day arrives when he realizes his mistake and laughs at his foolishness, but the re-separating of the two is hard and causes him many an hour of indescribable misery, but when it is over and the bitterness is past, he rejoices and is glad. Such a woman was Catherine Lucio. I mistook her for my ideal because of the physical resemblance.

"Now, it so happened that in Teheran there dwelt another youth, Abdulla Pasha, a Musselman, who also became enamored by her beauty. He lived in a veritable palace of surprising magnificence. I knew her first, but she cast me aside at his coming, believing him to be the richer. A short while afterwards, they were married, and the experience made me very bitter with the world, and I left Teheran, journeyed to the Isle of Constantine and settled down to a life of solitude in this ancient fortress. Some six months later, Abdulla Pasha moved to Kishm, for some unknown reason, with his wife, the beautiful, haughty Catherine Lucio. One day he came to Constantine, very gloomy. It seemed his wife had turned out a Tartar, a spendthrift, and all his money and wealth



were gone, save his jewels, which were valued at half a million tomans, for, in addition to his wife's expenses, he had met with business reverses and suffered heavy financial losses. He brought with him this day, to the island, several magnificent sapphires and wanted me to loan him money on the gems. The risk was not great and I acceded to his wishes. After that his visits became more frequent and each time he brought stones of priceless worth with him, till at last his supply had run out and he knew not what to do. Then, one day, in his anger, he drove his wife from his home, and she went away, glad to be free, faithless adventuress, to wreck the life of some other man, perhaps, as she had that of Abdulla Pasha. Up to the time of his meeting with her, he had naught but the loftiest ideals; but after she left, all his ideals lay in ruins. He had a wonderful sacred door built which led into the now empty jewel-room. On the front were carvings representing the Lion and the Sun. It had a keyhole which was of no use, for there was no lock behind it. The door was closed and secured, in some manner unknown to me, and the Pasha circulated it about that he had lost the key to his treasure room, and borrowed great sums of money on the jewels which it was supposed to contain. But in reality the room was empty; the jewels were lying quietly in my vault on the Isle of Constantine. The scheme was a good one. No Musselman would dare to break the door open, for, by so doing, he would be wrecking that which is sacred to his people, and sure to be cursed with the wrath of Allah if he dared

attempt to do so; and persons of other religions were afraid to destroy it for fear of the anger of the Musselmans. Thus the Pasha borrowed great sums of money and no one suspected him of dealing illegally.

"Meanwhile," went on Menehem Sorcha, "I continued to live, lonely, on the island. But one day I set out on a trip to Sultanabad, in West Central Persia, in search of several rare Shiraz rugs of which I had heard great tales. Sultanabad is distinctly Oriental, a fit specimen of the smaller native towns scattered promiscuously throughout the Province of the Sun. Huts of reeds, rushes and brushwood intermingled with Bedouin tents lie at the extreme outskirts of the town, on the border of the wild desert land. In the distance, low hills, bleak and yellow, stand out sharply on the horizon. With these as a background, the winding alleys of the native quarters, the mazes of the bazaars, and the crowded passages between the booths present a scene exceptionally picturesque. When I arrived at Sultanabad, I forgot my mission, for as I reached the market place, I was attracted by an exceedingly ugly crier, loudly proclaiming his wares. He was an auctioneer of women, low-born Syrian slaves for the most part. They stood in a row on a slightly elevated wooden platform, dirty, ragged and coarse looking, while he drew attention to their good points in a distinctly offensive manner. Nor was this all, for as I gazed upon these God-forsaken women, I noticed one who was far different from her companions, a maiden who seemed as diamond to pumice stone in comparison. She could not have been more

than twenty-one, and as she stood there, she looked like a drooping lily, her eyes cast sadly to the ground, her gentle breast heaving discernably. I gazed upon her, and forgot all else on earth; yea, even the beautiful Catherine Lucio and the wonderful rugs of Shiraz. Well, that evening the dainty slave, Agrippa, became mine. I gave her, at once, her freedom and told her of the great love which had awakened in my heart. She wept upon my shoulder at my goodness, and that moment was the happiest I had ever known. In the morning, at sunrise, we were married, and at once, with my little wife, I set off on my return to Constantine. I had gone off in search of rare rugs, but had brought back rare love instead. Such was the mother of Berenice, born a princess in the guise of a slave."

Sorcha's voice softened till it was scarcely audible. "She is dead now," he murmured sadly. "She died when Berenice was born. Yonder on the hillside she lies buried, and that is why I will never leave the island."

The Armenian lapsed into silence, and it was several moments before Anniston spoke.

Then he said, "You warned me against staying at Constantine. What you have spoken is very interesting, yet it does not explain the mystery."

"The danger is from Abdulla Pasha. He is a degenerate, a swindler with murder in his heart. He is plotting my destruction to regain possession of the jewels."

Menehem Sorcha was interrupted by the Jew,

Mochanda, who burst into the room and fell upon his knees before him.

"Master! Master!" he almost wailed, "the worst has happened. God have mercy upon us! They have burned the boats."

Sorcha sprang to his feet, alert on the instant.

"Trouble has broken at last," he said hurriedly, addressing Anniston. "The Pasha's men have burned our gondolas. We are helpless prisoners upon the island, without water or drink of any kind, save a few paltry bottles of wine. I might have known. I should have left a sentry to guard the boats. Fool! Miserable fool!"

IV

In the evening, as Anniston wandered through the shadowy, enchanting valley near the fortress, the faint sound of a girl's singing was wafted gently on the breeze to his ears. Instantly, his face lit up with unmistakable pleasure, and he started off in quest of the singer. He soon came upon her, a picture of profound repose, stretched at full length among the flowers, the finest flower of all, her eyes half closed in blissful meditation, the words falling softly from her lips and melting away on the cool, inviting air. For a moment he gazed upon her thus, carried away by the charm and beauty of her singing, and the words of Bishop Risland came unbidden to his mind, "Woman is God's greatest creation, the reed that bends to every breeze but breaks not in the tempest."

"Like the faint, exquisite music of a dream," he commented softly as she finished the song.

At his words, Berenice lifted her face to his, and he noticed that her eyes bore a look of almost celestial sadness, but, as they fell upon him, her face became wreathed in smiles.

"Your words are extremely complimentary," she murmured sweetly and motioned for him to sit beside her.

As he willingly complied with her unspoken request, he said, "A compliment ceases to be a compliment when it is well merited. Therefore, 'twas not a compliment I spoke, but the simplest of facts—the truth."

"I have always wished," he continued fondly, "to meet a girl who sees beauty in simplicity. One who understands the meaning of pathos. So long have I searched for such an one that I had commenced to think she did not walk the earth, till here at Constantine I find her, pure as a lily, lovely as a rose. Simplicity in dress is the greatest exponent of a woman's beauty. One seldom sees a really great painting in which the dress is not a minor feature of the picture."

"I see thou art a dreamer."

"Yes, a dreamer of beautiful dreams."

The wind sighed softly through the trees; a nightingale in the distance broke wildly into song and for several moments Berenice and the American sat in silence, listening to the weird sounds of the waters of the gulf breaking sonorously upon the beach.

Finally Anniston spoke. "When I came to you just now, you appeared sad. Would I be presuming to question the cause?"

"I was thinking what a pity it is that an island so entrancing, so charming should be without fresh water."

"It seems very strange in view of the fact that verdure is so plentiful," he interjected.

"Vegetation thrives because of the dense humidity of the atmosphere in the early morning," explained

Berenice sagely. "Despite this fact, however, it seldom rains. I suppose you are aware," she continued, "that we are helpless prisoners on this island, prisoners of thirst."

"Yes," he replied seriously, "your father has told me of the misfortune but I do not believe it is as bad as it seems. There must be some way out, some solution to the problem."

"I fear there is none."

"There is a solution to every problem, only our minds are not developed to a sufficient extent to work the big things out. I like to tear apart seeming impossibilities. If a thing is easy to do, there is no glory in doing it. There must be some way of getting water on this island. At Bahrein, one of the hottest places in the world, situated about three hundred and fifty miles west of here, the natives have a peculiar way of getting water from copious springs which burst forth from the bottom of the gulf, fully a mile from the shore. There are men there whose sole occupation is to dive down with sheepskin bags for the water. I wonder whether there are such springs in the gulf near Constantine."

"Who would dive for the water, even if there were?"

"I would."

"You?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"It would be dangerous."

Anniston shrugged his shoulders but made no reply.

"And useless also," she continued thoughtfully.

"There is not a chance in a million that the springs

could be found, and certainly not in time for our needs. We must have water at once!"

"There is truth in what you say. The plan is useless. I guess our only hope lies in Kishm Island. I will go there myself. I think I could make the trip in about an hour."

"But how?" she asked anxiously.

"By raft."

"Would it not be dangerous, Sahib? Do you think that you could do it?"

"I could make a try at least. 'Tis better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all. To remain passive on this island, waiting death from lack of water, would be foolish, with help so near at hand."

"But when you arrive at Kishm you are likely to be captured by the Pasha's men, as Mochanda was."

"I shall be prepared."

"What is one man against a mob?"

"If I am to be beaten," he said, "I'd rather be beaten by a score than an individual. There'd be less disgrace in the defeat. However, I mean to be the victor. Not only am I going to Kishm for water, but as a locksmith also. I intend to open the door of Abdulla Pasha's treasure-room."

"Surely you are jesting!" exclaimed Berenice in great astonishment, gazing eagerly into his eyes.

"On the contrary, I was never more in earnest."

For a moment she was silent. Then she said pleadingly, "Why don't you give up this foolish idea now, while there is yet a chance? The Pasha is a desperate man and would not hesitate at murder."

"'Never turn back from the path you have once, taken or otherwise you will only plunge into greater misfortune.'"

Her eyes dropped and her voice was scarcely audible.

"I would hate for anything to happen to you," she breathed wistfully.

"You would care?" he gasped, and the blood rushed with increased pressure through his veins.

"I think I would," she sighed. "I have met few men in my life, none like you, and although I have known you but a day, it seems as though our friendship had been lifelong."

"Berenice," he whispered happily, and folded her, unresisting, into his arms.

And as they sat thus, night fell and darkness closed in.

V

At sunrise, Anniston embarked for Kishm with Mochanda, on a crude raft, made from the trunks of two larches bound securely together with strong ropes.

"We have not time to build an ocean liner," he said dryly in reply to Menehem Sorcha's objections to the craft.

With a formal good-bye to the Master of Constantine and a rather prolonged one to Berenice, and the good wishes of both, Anniston bade a temporary adieu to the island. Half an hour later the raft was well on its way to Kishm. The feverish moist heat of the morning sun was scarcely endurable, shining down upon the torrid gulf, transforming it into a mirror of blinding, scorching brilliancy. To add to their discomfort, Mochanda lost his oar, and the speed of the raft was lessened considerably. But sometimes the darkest cloud has a silver lining, and evidently their's had, for a small gondola, carrying two men, suddenly hove in sight and bore rapidly down upon them. When it had almost reached them Mochanda turned deathly pale.

"A curse must be upon us, Sahib!" he exclaimed shakily. "It is the Pasha's boat, and the two rowers are his servants. Nothing can save us now. Our destinies stare us in the face."

"Never say die," replied Anniston grimly, as the gondola drew up alongside, and his jaw set with a determined snap.

The gondoliers recognized Mochanda and instantly pandemonium broke loose. One of them lifted his oar and struck the Jew sharply across the forehead with it. With a smothered groan he collapsed in a limp heap on the raft. Anniston uttered a sulphuric phrase and, maddened beyond control, his face livid and horrible with rage, he sprang onto the gondola. His right hand shot out and one of the Musselmans loosened his hold on his oar to grasp for several teeth which, in some mysterious manner, had emigrated from his mouth. The next moment the American had seized the discarded oar and beat the same kind of a tattoo on the head of the second Musselman as he had on that of Mochanda.

The raft had not drifted away during the scuffle, for it had lasted but a few seconds, and Anniston reached over and drew the inert form of Mochanda into the boat, at the same time addressing the Musselman with the bleeding mouth.

"We have too many passengers on board," he drawled easily. "I fear I must request you to continue your journey by raft." And suiting the action to the word, he lifted the body of the insensible Musselman onto it. With a look that made the other tremble, he commanded him to follow. Silently the man obeyed, his wicked eyes gleaming with hatred, but not daring to voice his sentiments. Anniston noticed his look and chuckled. "Hatred unspoken can

do but little harm," he reflected, pushing the raft away with one of the oars.

After making sure that it had drifted to a safe distance, he dropped on his knee by the side of Mochanda and examined his forehead critically.

"Nothing very serious," he observed. "The worst he can expect is a ripping headache when he comes to." Even as he spoke, the Jew opened his eyes and gazed foolishly about.

"What's the matter?" he demanded faintly.

"Nothing much," returned Anniston, "only we've traded the raft for a darn good boat."

VI

Shortly after the gondola reached Kishm, Mochanda re-embarked for Constantine, with several well-filled bags of water. Anniston sent one of his Arab servants with him to help guide the craft through the waters. He stood for some time on the rude wharf, gazing after the boat, until it had dissolved itself into the distant yellow haze which hung like a mantle over the horizon, then he turned and sought out his own adobe house.

The ensuing two hours were spent in making up as a Musselman street vender. When he had perfected his disguise to a degree satisfying to himself, he went to the Bazaar of the Holy Eunuch in search of the creditors of Abdulla Pasha.

He made his inquiries shrewdly and reservedly, and when the sun had just passed the zenith he had come across five men who claimed the Pasha owed them great sums of money. Their story of how the debts had been incurred agreed with that of Menehem Sorchas absolutely.

Anniston led the men to one of the coffee houses, and as they sipped the beverage he began: "It has been said that the key of the treasure-room of Abdulla Pasha has been lost. Do I not speak truly?"

"To the minutest detail," was the unanimous response.

"Has no one ever tried to open the door?"

"Several times," replied one of the Musselmans who kept a fruit stall in the Bazaar, "but always with the same result. It is impenetrable. It seems that Allah has purposely sealed this door to common man. It has a place to insert a key, but no key has yet been found to fit the aperture. We cannot burst it by force for it is emblazoned with figures rendered sacred by the Koran. Thus, Sahib, are we forced to let the matter rest until the door has fallen from its hinges by its own weight."

Anniston leaned toward the group of Persian gentlemen.

"I will open the door for you," he said boastfully. His face was a trifle flushed.

"Is the Sahib a locksmith?" inquired one, and there was a suggestion of rising interest in the tone.

"Among other things, I am," lied Anniston easily. "I have fought great fights with many a famous lock, but ever with the same result. I always have been victor. Now, hearing of this lock, by chance, my interest has been aroused and I wish to try my skill with it. Present me to the Pasha. Introduce me to his noble personage. Tell him you have hired me to open the door, for the day has come when you have tired of waiting for your money and will no longer listen to his procrastinations. Am I understood? Does my desire meet with your approval?"

"It does indeed," was the answer. The speaker was the boorish-looking fellow who had spoken before,

and the others signified by their expressions of approval that they agreed with him.

"Well, then, lead on," commanded Anniston brusquely. "The sooner started, the nearer the end." And even as he spoke, he led the way from the house and out into the highroad.

VII

An Irani servant entered the lounging chamber in the home of Abdulla Pasha.

"Master," he announced in a soft, musical voice, "six men stand in the anteroom."

The Pasha glanced up idly from his kalyan. His face was not good to look upon. "What is their desire?" he growled sullenly.

"They wish audience with you, most noble Sahib."

"Do you know them?"

"Yes—five, but the sixth is a stranger. He appears a man of common birth by his dress, but his face contradicts his attire. Master, I await your instructions," and the Irani saluted.

"I will speak with them," snapped the Pasha shortly. His face bore a scowl, but it had vanished when the curtains parted to admit the six visitors.

"Peace be unto you," he murmured by way of salutation.

"And to you also," was the reply.

"I trust you find the market good," smiled the Pasha amiably.

"As good as can be expected," returned Jeevanjee Kadir, the burly-looking creditor, "but 'tis not to discuss spot nor future but past business that we bore

you with our presence at this moment. Of a truth, in short, I mean the loans upon your treasure-chamber. You have proclaimed the door impenetrable, with good reason, having sought in vain for some one who could open it. We have such a man; we wish him to try his skill."

The Pasha coughed uneasily. "The door cannot be conquered," he said curtly. "Have we not proven this? Why let him tamper with it? He will only meet with failure."

"But we risk nothing, and we lose nothing; yet, if the unexpected should happen, we gain much."

"It is foolishness."

"Not at all. We have requested. If you do not meet with our suggestion, we will command. In sooth, it seems you do not wish the door unlocked."

"You judge me wrongly, Sahib," the Pasha hastened to say. "I do indeed. Nothing would give me greater pleasure."

For a moment he appeared wrapped in thought, then, evidently concluding that the newcomer would be as unsuccessful as the old, he said with alacrity, "Come, I will lead you to the door at once, and he can test his skill against this stubborn lock."

As he spoke he parted the portières and led the way to the cellar of the house. It was very dark and he lighted an oil lamp.

"Here is the door," he announced presently, and turning to Anniston, he continued coldly, "we will watch your progress in this undertaking."

The American made no reply, but striding over to

the door, he examined it critically. From a fold in his sleeve he drew a small black tube which he inserted in the keyhole. Then, turning to the Pasha, he said quietly, in Persian, "The light is very bad. I can scarcely see. I pray you, let me hold the lamp."

Unhesitatingly, the Musselman complied with his request. As he did so Anniston's face took on a smile of mastery.

"Back!" he cried, brandishing the blazing lamp, "for your lives!" And even as he spoke he touched the tip of the flame to the tiny black tube. It sputtered and hissed in a way which seemed to bode disaster.

The creditors understood. Panic-stricken, they turned and fled to safety, but not so the Pasha. His face went ghastly white, and springing forward, he clutched at the sparking fuse. Too late, his hand fell upon it. There was a blinding flash, a dull, muffled roar, a burst of flame, then quietness ensued.

When the smoke cleared away, the creditors cautiously returned and surveyed the wreckage. Abdulla Pasha lay face upward on the stone floor a few yards from the entrance to the treasure-room. Blood was oozing slowly from a deep wound in his temple and his right hand was terribly mangled. Jeevanjee Kadir knelt over him, but Abdulla Pasha had already breathed his last.

For a moment, the creditors gazed upon him in silence, then they turned their eyes upon the treasure-room. The door had been shaken from its hinges by the explosion. Inquisitively, they entered the chamber. A musty smell prevailed within the place, a

damp, unhealthy odor. Save for this the room was empty, absolutely empty! It contained not a jewel, not a precious stone, not as much as a kranbit. Speechless, they gazed upon the empty room in amazement. Slowly the truth dawned upon them. They had loaned their money on this collateral—nothing! Gradually their faces became distorted with hate as they realized their loss, and sudden fury took possession of them. They wanted to wreak their vengeance on some one, but the Pasha was dead.

Then Jeevanjee Kadir voiced the sentiments of all, "We will make the noble locksmith pay dearly for this deed. He hath destroyed emblems sacred to Allah! He hath killed the Pasha! Death to the blasphemer! Death to the defiler of the Prophet!" And the other Musselmans took up the cry and turned in search of the locksmith, but he could not be found, for in the confusion Boyd Anniston had disappeared.

VIII

Back in Constantine, late in the evening, Anniston made known his adventures to Menehem Sorchia and the lovely Berenice, even to the minutest details.

"Your story is good," observed Menehem Sorchia musingly, "yet does it make me sad. There is something pathetic, something solemn in the death of any man no matter how bad he has been. There is something majestic in the calm of peace. It makes men think. It brings out new editions of past facts. I knew Abdulla Pasha when he was as honorable as even you or I, but although some of us can never rise, even the greatest can sink, and so he did."

Menehem Sorchia lapsed into silence, but presently he commenced speaking again meditatively.

"A few days before Berenice was born," he said, "Catherine Lucio came to Constantine. She was very thin and wan looking. The beautiful rosy tint had faded from her cheek, her head was bowed down with grief, her spirit broken. She was very sick, and as I looked upon her, compassion took possession of my soul. I forgot everything. Forgot how she had treated me, forgot that she had wrecked the Pasha's life. I simply saw as she stood before me what she really was, a woman in trouble, and I took her in.

"I gave her food and sent to Kishm for a hakim who came and brought her medicine. But instead of making her better, it made her worse. Day by day she wasted away until she was but a shadow of her former self. And then one day, seeing that her life was drawing to a close, I sent for the Pasha, but the messenger returned with word that the Pasha would not come. As a last resort, for his dying wife's sake, I went to his home myself, telling Catherine Lucio whither I was bound. My words brought a ray of sunlight into her soul, one little flicker of hope that he would come and she would be forgiven, but my mission was fruitless. Abdulla Pasha was obdurate. I pleaded with him. He only snarled at me. I coaxed, I prayed, I begged, but his only answer was a curse. I was fighting the cause of a dying woman, a repentant woman, but my supplications had failed, and I returned to Constantine with a heavy heart. What would she say when I told her he would not come? That was the question which was biting at my heart. How should I tell her the truth? And I felt very sad as I thought how great would be the shock to her feeble frame. But my fears were wasted, for when I reached the fortress, Catherine Lucio was dead. I gazed upon her face from which all traces of wickedness had flown. It had been beautiful in life, it was celestial in death. It was the face of Catherine Lucio idealized.

"I sent formal notice to the Pasha of her death. He never came near the island, but I believe the blow was a great one to him and the cup of sorrow from

which he drank was made bitter by the dregs of remorse. It was then that hatred for me sprang up in his heart. When he heard of Berenice, his hatred increased, for he thought, and has always thought, that she is his daughter, Catherine Lucio's child, and that is why he plotted my destruction."

Berenice and Anniston were silent as he spoke in his soft, slow way, and after a moment's silence he called abruptly, "Haji!"

In reply a servant entered the room.

"Bring me my treasure chest!" commanded Sorchia decisively, and as the man silently withdrew to do his bidding, he turned to Anniston. "I have sent for my box of jewels," he said. "I mean to let you take your pick, to have any one you desire as a mark of my esteem for what you have done for me."

Anniston flushed, and rose to his feet. "I thank you for your offer from the bottom of my heart," he murmured softly, "and have already chosen."

"You have?" ejaculated Menehem Sorchia in great surprise. "Which is your choice?"

For a moment the American hesitated, then he said softly, "I choose Berenice, the finest jewel of all."

The old man seemed dazed by Anniston's reply and for a few seconds he gazed silently from one to the other. In both of their eyes he read the same plea—love. Where love reigns, fathers should not interfere.

And then, "A bargain's a bargain," he said cheerfully. "I always keep my word. But how can I give you what you already have?"

THE DOORMAT

I

From the window of his office on the eighteenth floor of the Knickerbocker Building, Barney Creighton gazed wearily, dreamily out over the light-dotted Hudson. Down below, gangs of workmen were jumping about like busy ants, working on the structure of the new Adams Building. The sound of the riveting and hammering floated up to his ears in a particularly jarring manner.

"New York is work mad, money mad!" he cried petulantly. "What good is progress, success, money if they bring neither happiness nor peace?"

With a sigh of unutterable weariness, he turned back to his desk. He was very tired, more tired than he had ever been before in all his life. Every bone in his body ached and seemed to be moaning in plaintive misery. Even his funny-bone seemed to have lost its sense of humor. He leaned far back in his great leather chair and stretched his arms above his head. Outside a sluggish, misty rain was falling and everything looked dark and gloomy. The aspect of the sombre night seemed even to have reflected into the offices of Creighton, Sears & Co. A single electric light broke the dense pall of blackness; but instead of

bringing any warmth and comfort into the room, it only served to make the shadows in the farthest corners more pronounced. The great, silent, empty building seemed strangely weird and uncanny. Somewhere down below a door banged and a bell tinkled faintly. But for these sounds Barney Creighton had no ears. His entire attention was concentrated solely upon the fact that he was tired. Finally, in an unguarded moment, a sound *did* penetrate to his ears. It seemed like the steady chug, chug, chug of the elevator coming up from the basement, though not without a voice of protest at working after hours.

The next moment the door of the office burst open and a cheerful, good-natured voice cried, "Hello, old boy; can you loan me a match? Cursed luck, my cigar has gone out."

Barney Creighton looked up quickly, as though startled from a land of dreams.

"Hello, Dan!" he drawled, when he had at length become able to focus his mind on present things. "Where did you come from?"

"Home, originally," was the laconic reply. "But I say, old chap, can't you loan me a match? I feel as badly in need of a smoke as a fellow lost in the desert does of water. Tobacco may knock a man's nerves to pieces, but it does it in a mighty soothing manner."

Barney Creighton slid a box of matches across the desk, and Dan turned the incident into barter by reciprocating with a cigar.

For a moment, the two men smoked in silence; Barney as though in a dream, Dan as if he had just

woke up. He glanced about at the exquisitely furnished office, everything mahogany, the chairs upholstered in black leather. Expensive, original paintings hung upon the wall; and the warm red velvet carpet on the floor seemed to cast a spell of peaceful calm over the entire room. Finally his eye wandered to Barney's desk, piled almost ceiling-high with letters and litter, the natural alluvium of a busy day, the one bit of chaos in that otherwise well-ordered office.

Dan Burnett whistled softly.

"What's the matter, Barney, old man?" he drawled. "Turning into a machine?"

Barney smiled wistfully.

"I seem to be narrowing down to just that," said he.

"What's the matter? Are you money mad like all the rest of New York?"

"No," was the reply, "I work, not for money, but simply because it takes my mind from other things. Somewhere I have read an old proverb about not looking backward when you put your hand to the plow. But the old saying is not complete. To it should be added not to look forward either."

The tone in which the words were uttered left no doubt of the fact that there was something bearing heavily on Barney Creighton's mind.

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked Dan presently.

"That I have put my hand to the plow, that I look neither forward nor backward. The past is over; the future will take care of itself. In the meantime, I have my work." Barney Creighton leaned forward

in his chair, and now in his voice there was a strange, wonderful sincerity. "Dan," he said, "I've got to work, because I've got to forget."

"What do you mean?"

"Just the same old trite sentence which ten thousand men have uttered before me. I loved a girl with all my heart and soul. The thought of her was the sweetest essence of my life. She invaded my dreams; and waking, she was ever near me. In my office sometimes as I sat dictating a letter her face seemed to laugh up into my own from the printed page before me. Sometimes I drew pictures in the smoke of my cigar, wonderful, dream-world pictures of a little home that might have been, way off somewhere in the mountains among the glorious pines and flowers. And I used to see her waiting for me by the old rustic turnstile in a garden at eventide, laughing merrily, wonderfully happy at my return. And then I would take her into my arms. But I never kissed her. Somehow it didn't seem just right."

He paused for a moment and gazed wistfully into the smoke of his cigar. "Oh, Dan," he continued presently, "can mere words describe a dream like that? To me she was an angel, a dream, a goddess. At last I had something to work for in my life. . . . Finally a day came when business matters drew me to Alaska. I was gone three months. During all that time I received but three letters from her. That was like Marion. She always forgot a man as soon as he had gone from her sight. And then the day

came for me to return home. 'Home'—what a wonderful wealth of meaning lay in that one simple word. To me it didn't represent the bald, dreary bachelor apartment in which I dwelt. To me the wondrous word meant one lovely girl—Marion Maxwell. . . . In the natural sequence of events I arrived in New York and at once sought out her home. But it was a different home-coming to what I had imagined. You see she had been engaged two months. . . . For seven years I knew her; seven years of my life, the best years of my life had been given entirely to her, and now she had shattered all my dreams with as little thought as a child might burst a soap bubble. . . . Understand, I am not censoring her. . . . She is still the only woman of my life. But, like many another, she cannot think, she cannot, does not understand. She has become a part of myself. A man cannot tear seven years from his life and begin all over again."

Barney Creighton's thin, handsome face looked strangely wan and haggard in the dull, yellow light. His hands gripped the arms of his chair until the fingers turned white to the nails. This was his one sign of emotion, but to Dan Burnett it was enough. He leaned over and placed his hand upon Barney's shoulder and in a voice that shook, he said, "Barney, was she good enough for you?"

"She was too good, Dan."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it, old man. It's to your credit. It only proves out what I have thought and known always: you are a gentleman. To stick

to a woman even after a thing like this is the very essence of greatness. For my own part, I do not believe I'd have the courage."

"If you really loved a woman, you would. A man's love isn't a cloak that can be worn by any woman. It's made for just one woman. I think that explains everything. Marion Maxwell still has the cloak of my love. The fact that Roger Patterson has won her fairly cannot change the matter."

Dan Burnett sprang from his chair.

"Who did you say?" he cried excitedly.

"Roger Patterson," repeated Barney. "Do you know him?"

"Not intimately. I have run across him several times in business, much to my regret. He has been married once before, but his wife secured a divorce soon after the wedding. She has since died, I hear, so of course that is no drawback to Marion's wedding. And yet there are men in the Exchange who will not shake the hand of Roger Patterson. He is not honorable. Not a single stenographer will work for him. When a man cannot keep a stenographer, there's something wrong somewhere. I lay no specific charge at his feet. He has never committed any crime; his whole life is just given over to petty meanness."

Barney Creighton's face had grown very white. In his excitement, his cigar had slipped from his fingers and rolled to the floor forgotten.

"Tell me all you can about Roger Patterson," he said hoarsely. "Oh, Dan, I think it nothing but right that I should know."

The tone of his voice struck Dan Burnett to the heart. It seemed to him as though someone were scourging his soul with a whip. He was Barney Creighton's greatest friend, so naturally what affected Barney affected him. Truly nothing is so rare as the strong, whole-hearted friendship of two men.

"I can't tell you much about Roger Patterson," was the reply. "All that I know is that he's a stock broker, the same as you yourself, but whereas you have money to back you up, he plays the game simply on his nerve. He lives from day to day on the extreme edge of hazard. Any hour may see his ruin. His offices in the Empire Building are magnificent, but his bank balance would make R. G. Dun & Co. sick. I frankly admit that to a certain degree, I admire the man's unutterable faith in himself. He bids apparently recklessly, working solely on a margin, and yet he always seems to get through somehow. At present he is trying to manipulate a big deal in Bleecker's Infused Steel stock. He's booming the market, although he knows the stock is practically worthless. Smith & Weston own about forty per cent of the capital stock and it is orally understood that they are willing to sell. You know they have gone over entirely to cotton stock and so of course are naturally willing to accept almost anything for their shares in Bleecker's Infused Steel, especially in view of the fact that they are practically worthless."

"Why?" demanded Barney Creighton curtly.

"For a dozen reasons. In the first place, Bleecker's capital is practically wiped out. There is scarcely any

available cash. Then again they are making an addition to the plant at a great cost when in reality they haven't enough work to keep the old plant in active operation. The contractors are being paid with ninety-day paper, but where the money is to come from to take it up is a problem which would tie the original inventor of algebra up in a knot. And there is also another reason, which is probably the greatest of all. Three-quarters of the company's business is the manufacture of milling cutters, and the cutters will not stand up under test. Surely that is evidence enough."

Barney Creighton sprang to his feet, and his hand crashed down on the desk with a thunderous bang.

"Yes, it is evidence enough!" he cried wildly, his eyes flashing fire. "It's evidence of a dozen things. I've been blind all my life. I almost let the girl of my heart marry a man who would ruin her life, simply because in her blind ignorance, she thought she loved him. But she shan't marry him, Dan, old man, not if I have to pick her up bodily and take her to the North Pole. If Roger Patterson wants fight, he'll get it. Some people were put on earth just to be carpets for other people to walk on!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Dan Burnett.

"Mean!" raved Barney Creighton like a throbbing furnace. "I mean that I'm sick of being a doormat for other people to trample on. All my life I've been smeared with easy-going softness. Now I'm going to take a mental bath. Every friend I own, except you, old man, has used me for years as their 'Fourth National.' I don't know why, unless I was simply

born to be a doormat and have remained one simply to follow out the natural idea of things. I ought to have 'Welcome' tattooed on my back so that my friends would feel more at home when they walked over me."

As he spoke, he commenced walking up and down the room as though he were almost bursting with suppressed energy.

"But now I'm through with it all!" he cried. "Nobody'll ever use my spine for a ladder again. And as for Roger Patterson, I'll crush him against the wall until the streak of yellow in his nature rubs off on the bricks. You spoke just now of his deal in Bleecker's Infused Steel. The poor fool thinks he has a snowball in his hand when in reality he has a live-hot coal which he will eventually find he cannot handle. Bleecker's cash capital is practically wiped out because they are investing it all in buildings. I'm giving you strictly confidential, inside 'dope.' The board of managers in the past was a trifle slack, but the entire firm is being reorganized. It has contracts pending with a dozen of the biggest railroads in the country to supply all the infused steel used. It realizes that there is a big boom just ahead. As for the reason it falls down on milling-cutters, that is simple enough. There is no competent foreman or metallurgist in charge of the furnace room, nobody to see that metals are subjected to the exact degree of heat necessary, nor that the steel is infused to the proper depth. Consequently, the milling-cutters fall down under test. It is not the process that's at fault, but the manner in which it is carried out. Under the new management,

this slip-shod executive condition will be eliminated."

"But how do you know all this?" asked Dan Burnett breathlessly.

"For the simple reason," replied Barney Creighton, "that I own fifty-one per cent of the capital stock of Bleecker's Infused Steel."

Dan Burnett threw up his hands in amazement.

"God help Roger Patterson!" said he.

II

Barney Creighton arrived late at his office the next morning. The clock on Old Trinity had already chimed ten before he blew in like a whirlwind.

"Mr. Duncan, of Duncan & Co. has called you up four times," his stenographer told him as he threw his hat and coat upon a chair in his usual hurried manner.

"Get him on the 'phone, please," he replied shortly. "I was late this morning because I had an appointment with Smith & Weston."

Two problems puzzled Miss Alicia Raymond. Why did he take the trouble to explain where he had been, and why did he smile in such an odd manner as he told her?

In the meantime, Barney Creighton was looking over his mail. Mrs. Lindsay wanted a donation for the colored orphan asylum.

"Nothing doing," he growled. "I'll never have any use for that."

He picked up another letter. "Can I send you a box of Havana Perfectos?" he read.

"Yes," he wrote across the bottom of the page, "if you mean it for a gift."

The telephone buzzed at that moment. Seizing the receiver, he began, "Hello! Duncan & Co.? . . . No. . . . Oh, what number are you calling, please? . . .

Yes, this is Creighton, Sears & Co. . . . Barney Creighton speaking. . . . Yes. . . . Oh, hello, Littlefield. . . . Can't pay that note? . . . What! you want time? How would six months on Blackwell's Island strike you? . . . No, I won't give you another day. Note's two weeks overdue now. . . . You have the wrong number, this is *not* the Bureau of Charities. . . . Words, my dear boy, will never pay that note. . . . Good-bye."

He had hardly hung up the receiver, when the telephone buzzed again.

"This is Mrs. Clarkson speaking," came a thin, cattish voice, as he put his ear to the receiver. "I am on the board of directors of the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Poor. . . ."

"Yes," interjected Barney peevishly.

"I know a woman who has eight children," continued the voice.

"I know one that has ten," he snapped. "You needn't have telephoned that information. You could have dropped me a card. . . ."

As he banged up the receiver with an ejaculation of poorly suppressed anger, he gazed into the blank face of one of the office boys.

"Mr. Sears just told me he didn't need me any more," began the youth. "What do you think of that?"

"I think you're fired," said Barney curtly. "Get out!"

Miss Raymond appeared in the doorway. "Duncan & Co. are on the wire," said she.

As he took down the receiver, Barney Creighton said, "Miss Raymond, if all the kings in Europe call me up in a body, don't connect them with me unless they tell you what they want."

Then he turned his attention to the 'phone.

"Hello! Is this Mr. Duncan? . . . Yes, this is Creighton speaking. . . . I say, Alf, buy up all the Bleecker's Infused stock possible, only don't mention my name. I think Roger Patterson will let you have about forty per cent of the capital stock. . . . Yes, buy it in the open market if you like. It won't do any harm to start a boom."

* * * * *

Late in the afternoon Roger Patterson discovered that he had overstepped the extreme edge of hazard at last. He had gone short of the market on Bleecker's Infused stock by four thousand shares.

All night long Roger Patterson walked up and down the floor of his office, a prey to conflicting emotions. If Barney Creighton held him to the letter of his contract in this deal, he was practically ruined. Ponder as he would, he could find no solution to the problem. Every line of thought that raced through his tired brain led to one conclusion. There was nothing to do but to throw himself on Barney Creighton's mercy. He knew that Barney had a name for being kind-hearted. Dear old Barney Creighton, he was loved by every broker downtown. A perfect shower of invitations poured into his office in every morning's mail. And each letter was absolutely sincere. Others might be invited to dinner because the hostess thought

it her duty, but Barney was invited just for his own charming self.

Roger Patterson smiled cynically as he thought of this. "If one has to balance himself on the brink of ruin," he drawled, "it's just as well to have a kind-hearted fool hold the reins as any other person."

Before nine the next morning, Roger Patterson presented himself at Barney Creighton's office. As luck would have it, Barney had already arrived downtown. He listened to Roger Patterson's plea for leniency.

"If I could only have a little time," that was the drift of all his arguments.

"For the safety of the public," drawled Barney, "it might be quite a good idea."

Roger Patterson smiled in spite of himself. "Scarcely complimentary," said he.

"I only compliment the men to whom I sell," said Barney cynically. "It's one of the new business policies which I have just adopted. Another is, to hold a man to his contract at any cost. I am running a business office, not a kindergarten. If a signed contract is of no consequence, what is there upon which to base business?"

"Can't we come to terms in some way?" begged Roger Patterson.

"Yes, by delivering the stock."

"I can't."

"Then give me a check for the margin."

"I haven't enough available cash. Everything is going against me lately."

"Well, then there is only one thing to do. I will make you a special offer. It may sound ridiculous, but nevertheless I am perfectly serious. If you will hire me as your chauffeur, of course under an assumed name, I will not hold you to your contract."

Roger Patterson sat speechless with surprise.

"Of course," continued Barney, "I admit the suggestion sounds idiotic, but whether it is or not is not for *you* to decide. I might say, however, that I desire adventure and the humor of such a situation appeals to me. I wish to be treated exactly like a chauffeur. My position will be to run your car. There our business dealings will end. Now it's up to you to accept this offer or refuse it. Don't let me influence you. Suit yourself. The matter is of slight importance to me."

"But to me it is momentous!" exclaimed Roger Patterson. "Therefore, although I do not know your hidden reason for this offer, I accept. There is nothing else for me to do."

"No," was the cynical reply. "The result in any case is approximately the same. If I didn't drive the car for you, I'd be driving it for myself, so what's the difference?"

III

It was not until a week later that Barney Creighton in his new position had the pleasure of driving Marion Maxwell out into the country in Roger Patterson's great green touring car. So naturally the day was a red-letter one for Barney. Roger Patterson had suggested motoring to a little inn overlooking the Hudson, some fifty miles from New York. His description of the charming spot met with Marion's instant approval, and thus it was that at last Barney Creighton had the pleasure, as aforesaid, of driving the woman he loved, and the man she thought she loved, out into the country on a certain warm September morning.

Now they shot through a patch of woodland, then through a little village and again back into the woodland again. All about them hung a wondrous silence, broken softly by the many whispering voices of the wood; the chirping of crickets, the gurgling of hidden brooks and the gently soothing, sighing of the breeze through the treetops.

"Isn't it all wonderful," exclaimed Marion enthusiastically, at length; "everywhere silence, not a soul to intrude, not a voice to break the wondrous, fairylike web of solitude!"

"And do you love the silence of the open places?" asked Roger Patterson softly.

"Yes," said she wistfully. "I have loved the great outdoors all my life."

"You would love the desert," he whispered dreamily. "As I close my eyes, I can see you now, my little dream-girl of the desert, back in the great silent places where you belong. When we are married, if I can spare the time, we will go to Egypt and live alone in the desert for many months, until you tire of it."

"I often wonder whether anyone can ever tire of the desert," she mused. "It is ever the same, yet always different. There are no words that can describe the desert. One could live in it forever and never grow to understand it, never solve its wondrous silent mystery."

"Once," said he, "many years ago, I went to Persia, and at Shiraz, the Paris of the Far East, I heard a strangely lovely little legend which I have always remembered. It seems at one time there dwelt near Shiraz an old, sweet-tempered, lovable Syrian who wandered alone in the desert. As he travelled over the great billows of ever-changing sand he used to see visions of gardens of wondrous beauty, peopled by women of exquisite charm. There was one dream-girl in particular who used to come to him every night, as he sat alone out under the glorious canopy of stars. Her face was as soft as a rose, and as sweet as the most fragrant flower. Like a breath of love, she would creep to the side of the old, shrunken beggar, and press her soft warm lips to his brow. And at

such moments he would forget his dirty, filthy rags, for in the eyes of this lovely vision he was a prince. Such was the dream of the old Syrian, whom some pitied, others laughed at, and a few dismissed with the simple statement that he was mad. But as for myself, when I heard of the old Syrian, I envied his wonderful dreams. But the people in the city I pitied, the people who lacked romance, and could not understand." He leaned down and took her hand in his. "But now," he continued, looking into her eyes, "I no longer envy the old Syrian, for I, too, have found my dream-girl."

She looked into his face, and as she did so she involuntarily shrank back. She also had been thinking of a honeymoon spent in the desert, but she had been thinking not of Roger Patterson, but of herself and Barney Creighton. When she realized this she was angry with herself, angry that such an idea had even entered her mind. She was engaged to Roger Patterson. Barney Creighton was a thing of the past. To change the trend of her thoughts, she leaned toward Roger.

"Tell the chauffeur to drive fast," she urged lightly. "I feel as though I would like to fly."

Obedient to her wish, Roger directed the chauffeur to increase the speed. And he did. The car shot forward as though it were trying to overtake Barney Oldfield. On over the country it tore like a thing possessed. Up hill and down dale, on and on it sped. Once it almost tipped into a lake, and Roger Patterson's heart jumped into his throat.

"You fool! Slacken down!" he cried angrily. "Are you trying to wreck the car?"

"I can't!" bellowed back the chauffeur. "The darn thing has got beyond my control! It *won't* stop!"

As he spoke they were racing over a mountain road particularly perilous. On one side, the rocks piled up toward the sky for almost a thousand feet; on the other, they could look down, a sheer drop of a hundred feet, to a little stream below. Even as Roger Patterson gazed down shudderingly toward the water, the car gave an ominous lurch and appeared to pause on the very brink of the cliff. He expected momentarily to be hurled into the air and dashed to pieces on the rocks below. And yet the car kept on.

Marion Maxwell crouched in one corner, her face flushed, her eyes flashing. It might be extremely perilous, she thought, but also she admitted that it was a distinct novelty. One thing she noticed which Roger Patterson had evidently overlooked. The chauffeur might have lost control of the car, but he had the steering gear under perfect control. She could tell that by the way he missed colliding a hundred times with great, huge trees on the crooked road.

At last they sped down from the dangerous cliff road and out onto a comparatively level country.

"Now is our chance!" shrieked Roger Patterson. "Jump!"

But the girl did not move. In great surprise, she realized that he was frightened. His face was pale with fear and his mouth twitched nervously. Apparently his nerves were strained almost to the break-

ing point. Inadvertently she could not help comparing him to the chauffeur, whose back rose up before her. To all appearances, he was no more ruffled than if he were driving at a moderate speed through a city street. With a shudder, she realized that Roger Patterson was a coward. In that moment, she felt as though she detested him.

Again a great hill with a perilous cliff road loomed up ominously before them. Roger Patterson noticed it and shuddered.

"This is our last opportunity!" he entreated wildly. "For God's sake, jump!"

"No," she replied coldly. "I am not going to jump."

She slipped the engagement ring from her finger and forced it into his hand. "Quick, you coward!" she cried, her eyes flashing, "jump before it is too late!"

Roger Patterson gave one agonizing glance toward the hill, a glance in which was blended fear and terror almost to frenzy. Then he jumped, and the car sped onward up the hill without him. And now a strange thing happened. The break-neck speed lessened considerably, until as the car came down the hill it was going at little more than a moderate rate of speed. Marion Maxwell was greatly surprised at this, but her curiosity was not gratified until they had gone another mile. Then the chauffeur abruptly stopped the car and removed his hat and goggles.

"Barney Creighton!" she cried breathlessly.

"Yes," said he. "Will you marry me? If you had

taken me in the beginning we wouldn't have had all this fuss."

"But how did you get here?" she gasped.

And then he told her the whole crazy story.

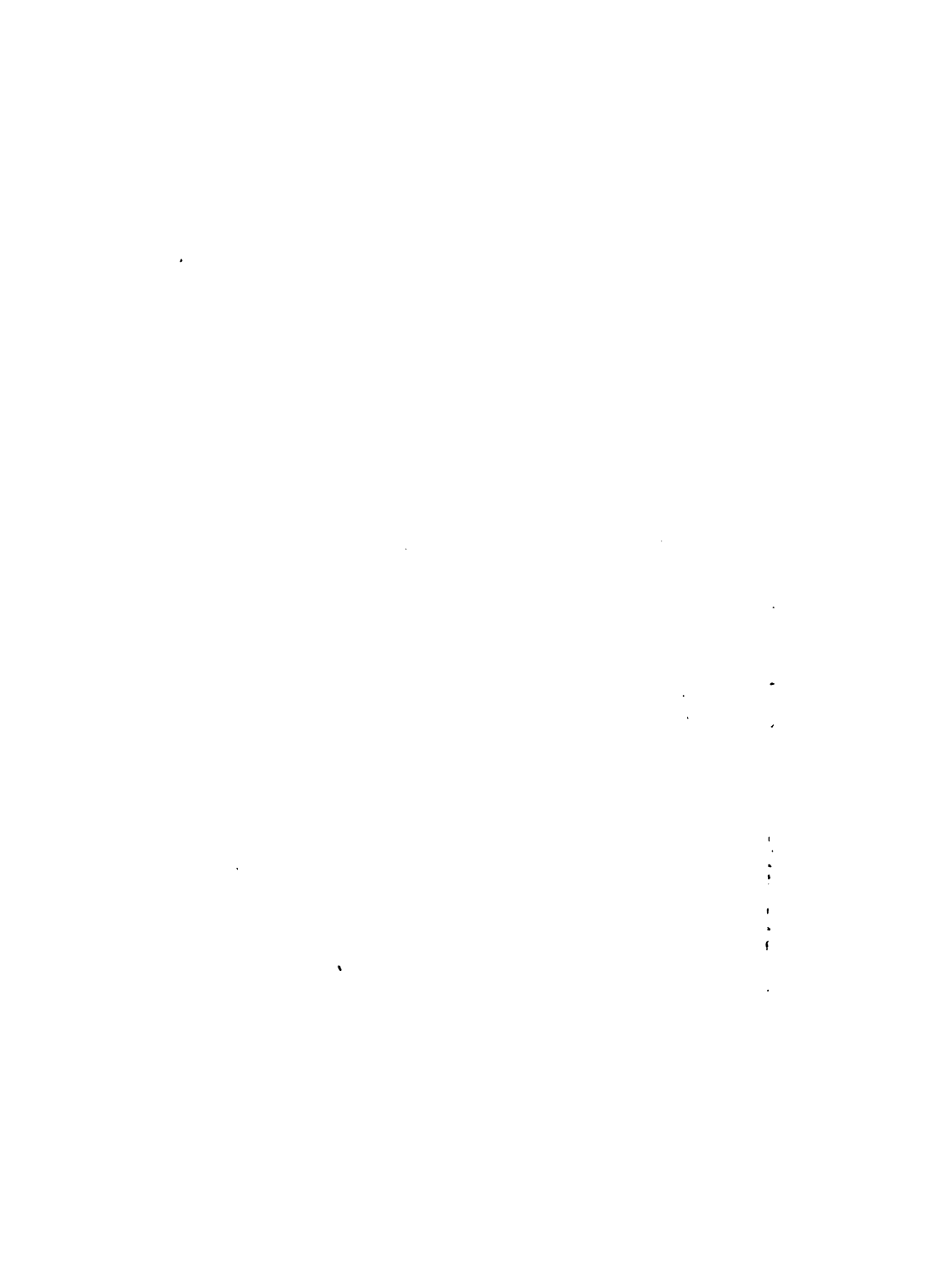
"And now," he finished, "Roger Patterson's jumped out of your life. Why not let him stay out?"

"I'm going to," she whispered demurely.

And then he climbed over the seat and kissed her.

"All my life," said Barney, as he held her in his arms, "I've been a doormat for everybody. But at last somebody poured oil upon the doormat and set it afire. In the future, to others, I am going to be a Persian rug; but to you I'll always be a doormat that you can walk all over."

"I think," said she wickedly, "I'd rather sit on your lap."





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